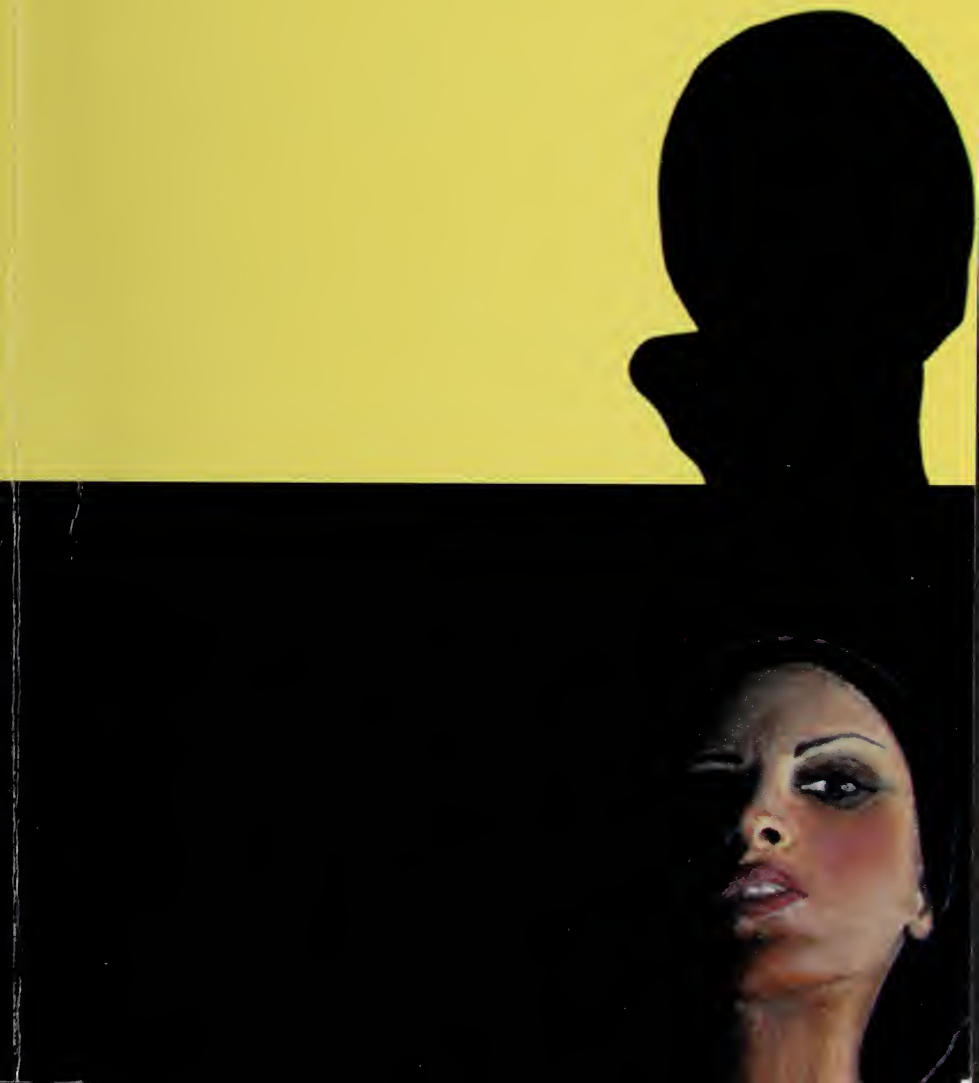
the watermark

volume xvi



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a journal of the arts

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The Watermark is a journal of arts and literature published bi-annually by the University of Massachusetts Boston. The journal is entirely operated by a staff of students. We are dedicated to publishing the highest quality poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual art by the University's undergraduate and graduate student bodies.

The Watermark accepts submissions from the beginning of September through the end of February. Selections for publication have been reviewed anonymously by a democratic jury process. Information about submitting or getting involved can be found on our Web-site (URL below) or in person at our office on the 2nd Floor of the UMB Campus Center. The journal holds North American first-time serial rights to published pieces only; copyrights remain with the authors/artists.

The Watermark is supported by a yearly grant from the UMB Student Senate as well as a generous contribution from UMB's Graduate Student Assembly. Copies of the journal are free to students, staff, and faculty of the University and are available throughout the campus.

The off-campus price of single issues is $10.95; subscriptions are available for $20 per year. All proceeds from sales and subscriptions of the journal are used to fund our prizes (information in the back of the issue.)

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Editor's Note

I've never met an editor who wasn't a little bit of a tyrant. In a sense, we have to be; as any one of us will tell you, putting together a literary journal is an exhausting business. Between the last minute edits and layout snafus, creative flexibility can run out quickly, and two weeks before we go to press, I sometimes begin to resemble a malfunctioning robot, spewing policy guidelines to any staff member who will listen. *The deadline is midnight! We do not accept work submitted in Helvetica!* At times, it's easy to forget what this job is really about.

One of the most powerful pieces in this issue of the Watermark began as a mistake. Back in October, I received a submission from a man who asked that his name not be listed if his work was chosen for the journal. I wrote back that we were sorry, but we didn't publish anonymous work, and he asked that his submission be rescinded.

I thought I had deleted it, but his work ended up in my database anyway, mistakenly listed under another author's name. The piece went into the non-fiction packet, and our readers voted it unanimously in; the next week, I received word that it had won our Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction award. It wasn't until I was working on layout, double-checking every author and artist's name, that I realized my mistake.

I re-read *Sacrifice* three times in a row that night, and I was humbled by it. It's beautiful and excruciating writing, raw and controlled all at once. It is more important than any policy I could ever dream up. Luckily for our readers, the author was gracious about letting us publish it after all that fuss; you can read it on page 46.

Truth be told, I could rave about every piece in this issue of the Watermark, but two others bear mention here. Meghan Chiampa's poem, *Kurt Vonnegut's Heaven*, is especially timely as we mourn the loss of that unique literary citizen; and I am very pleased to print Jason Bedore's story, *Anything to Notice Nothing*, which was cut last semester due to space constraints.

Finally, I'd like to give credit where credit is due and thank a few of the many people who help make the Watermark what it is. The faculty of the Creative Writing Department, including Lloyd Schwartz, Joyce Peseroff, John Fulton, and Askold Melnyczuck, continue to offer strong support and excellent advice, as well as funding for the fiction and poetry awards. Many other professors in the English and Art

departments, and across campus, helped to promote the journal on their own, and by allowing us to visit their classes at the start of the semester.

I thank Elizabeth Searle, who came through at the eleventh hour to judge both the Chet Frederick Fiction Award and the Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award; and Janaka Stucky, for judging the Martha Collins Poetry Award, and for his friendship. The Undergraduate Student Senate and the Graduate Student Senate continue to provide the financial support to keep the Watermark in print, and Alphan Gunaydin provided the technical support to keep us on the Web. Theodora Kamenidis, our art editor, provided us with a beautiful cover. I am especially grateful to the Watermark's advisors, Donna Neal and Kelly Meehan in Student Life, who juggle outlandish workloads and still remain bastions of patience and creativity; and to my fiancé, Morgan Coe, for his love and encouragement and for keeping me on my toes.

Most of all, I am indebted to the authors and artists who submitted their work, and to my tireless staff. From reading each and every submission we receive with diligence and care, to showing up to meetings during break, to answering my emails at three in the morning, you have made this journal what it is. My congratulations to all of you who are graduating- I will miss you, my friends.

Rosie Healy
May 2007

Nathan Gamache

First Warm Winter

Martha Collins Poetry Award Winner

No need to go outdoors—
  I'll attend to things
Inside. Still, I can't avoid
  The moon, it sends
Its light back into my room
  & with a little light
One listens more & cannot
  Sleep. It's almost
Spring, do you feel this air?

Listen for crickets, or
A bullfrog's throat, like milk,
  Chugging. Anything
To keep my mind off of days,
The next, or the next.
Why, they just keep coming…
  How to be thankful?

Listen. If I wake up tomorrow
  (Which I think I ought,
I know, it's true, without ever
Even thanking you) I'll
Listen to what you tell me & I
Will know what you're
About. Promise me you won't
Be lonely *ever*! anymore.

Michael Grohall

Walk to Forest Hills

I
Weather never ceases to amaze me—
two days before December
the air is humid and intimate
warm enough to walk naked
and exhale contentment.

II
I am walking, clothed, to Forest Hills
twelve full city blocks
not wanting to be inside a minute
more than necessary on a day at
the farthest edge of summer.

III
Spanish barbers open late,
a men's club for all ages.
Like a consulate,
this is foreign land inside.
Once a barber, who spoke no English,
put down his clippers, left me in the chair
and went outside to greet his campañero.
Caucasians are so, so fragile...
Imagine that happening on the boulevard.

IV
The angled overpass throws an awkward
shadow, a dark third lane for commuting trash.

V
Young tree, you scandalize—
your flapper dress of clinging leaves
shimmying and nearly nude
you tease.

VI
Gas is gas says Stan Hatoff.
Behind dim-lit glass,
an inner city priest sits in attendance.
He takes only cash and confessions.
"Forgive me Father, for I have sinned",
an unshaved man leans in.
"What is your trespass?"
"I drive an old Buick, twelve miles to the gallon.
My daughter needs a winter coat."
A thin pause and then...
"Well, put only forty dollars in today
and pray for a warm December."

VII
Lowriders stretch gull-wing doors to the sky.
The car wash is open night and day, its ten bays
stand like hookers, promising men and their cars
some good clean fun. A lone radio raises its voice
over the noisy vacuum.

VIII
The bus I'd hoped to catch
is just pulling out past the station
and my reach. Across from the bar,
Chinese restaurant, check-cashing place,
auto insurance, coffee shop and liquor store
I will wait the twenty minutes.
At Forest Hills station I am alone
with my thoughts and the first flash
of a poem.

Markus Gehann

Williamsburg, NY

Tanya Boroff

Atmospheric Pressure

Chet Frederick Fiction Award Winner

Finally, after four straight days, the rain stopped. In the library, the very library where her great-grandfather had long ago announced to her great-grandmother that he'd been enjoying the company of various maids every Thursday of the month and even on Sundays here and there, and where her great-grandmother had hung her head for only the briefest of seconds before telling him that was, in fact, perfectly okay with her, Tracy listened to the taps against the bow window grow slower and farther apart. Then it stopped, and the sun came out, and because it was still midday, it cast a glare against the big screen TV on the far wall, where Mo Vaughn had just hit one high and deep to left, off the green monster. She stopped for a minute and watched him cruise in to second base with a stand up double, and she had to remind herself that it was winter and the game she was watching had happened before. Before her twenty-fourth birthday, before Rob proposed unexpectedly on the flight back from Hilton Head, before the spring-like autumn trickled into an even more spring-like winter that was the only topic of conversation anymore, even as she sat through fittings and picked out centerpieces. At her engagement dinner, everyone complained about the puddles and having to wear rain boots under their fancy dresses and suits and tote wet umbrellas into the banquet hall. The weather, everyone griped, was wreaking havoc.

If they only knew, she thought as she poured herself a drink. Scotch neat, just like Grandpa John drank every Christmas. *Hey, Cowgirl, how 'bout a drink?* She always made the drinks, one after another, while her mother and aunts sat by the tree, making catty comments about each other, getting louder and louder until someone inevitably started to cry, while the men smoked cigars and pretended the women were not present. Everyone drank, and no one talked to her until the drinks needed refilling.

They would all be there today. All of them, even the ones she'd rather avoid. Aunts, cousins, second-cousins, uncles, grandparents (except Grandpa John, who couldn't leave the nursing home), the fam-

ily friends she'd known all her life and liked better than most blood relatives, the family friends she'd learned the hard way not to be in a room alone with. And, of course, her mother and her mother's second husband, David.

Her mother had insisted on this wedding, this giant, hastily planned affair that no one had the guts or perhaps temerity to point out was ruining everyone's holiday season. Since just before Halloween, Tracy had endured countless dress fittings, congratulatory dinners, lunches to discuss floral arrangements, place settings, color schemes, and menu selections. All of these occasions had involved some friend or family member who most definitely had something else they could be doing. But her mother had it all planned. A Christmas wedding, all red bows and ivory lights, with bridesmaids in red satin and Tracy dressed all in glittery winter-white like the sugarplum fairy. She was insistent; the wedding had to happen by Christmas, and she relentlessly controlled every detail until everything was just like she wanted. Tracy's mother always got what she wanted.

Except when it came to the weather. The rain was something she hadn't planned, although she shrugged it off repeatedly as though it was a battle she was used to losing. *What do you expect with a winter wedding*, she asked, as the constant ping of water against windshields and window panes refused to let up. She didn't seem to worry, to fear that the fog might cause one of the limos to swerve off the road, hit a tree and completely split in half, causing the glass from the sun roof to shatter and sprinkle over the unconscious bodies in the back, or that the drop in temperature at night would create a patch of black ice that no one would see as they drove along, gossiping about how Tracy had landed someone like Rob in the first place or how the engagement had been so short in order to keep him from getting away, and the spin out would take them all by surprise, especially the driver, who couldn't think fast enough to remember to steer into the skid, and when they hurtled over the jersey barrier into the oncoming traffic on the other side of the highway, the last words on their lips would probably be something about the endless rain.

Tracy worried about these things. She never drove in the snow, and hated driving in the rain. She had a recurring daydream, her in the right lane, as always, driving about fifty-five, maybe sixty. She had to scratch her eye. She knew she should never do this. Her mother

constantly chastised her: *Don't pull on your eyes, it causes wrinkles.* But she had an itch, right in the corner of her right eye, and just as she scratched it, bright light filled her car. She heard the skid, the screech of brakes, and she was still scratching her eye as the car hit her from behind. The scratched cornea would cause partial blindness, but the pain would keep her from noticing the blood streaming down her face after her head hit the steering wheel.

She thought about things like that a lot. Any number of terrible things could happen. *I hear this El Nino thing is causing a terrible drought in Central America*, someone had remarked at dinner one night, and Tracy watched for her mother's eyes to meet hers but they never did. She didn't want to hear about El Nino's impact on far off countries, the droughts in Southern Africa, the too-low water levels in Malaysia or Thailand. The impact at home concerned her far more. She knew all too well what the weather was capable of, but her mother and David, and even Rob, would tell her she was silly to worry about factors beyond her control.

David never let the weather concern him. He never let anything concern him, Tracy thought, looking out the library window, except how to spend her father's money. If her father were here, he'd tell her to be wary, that the sun was just a façade. *See those clouds over there that look like little pouches*, she could almost hear him warn. That's a low pressure center. *There's a storm brewing.* Her father was a meteorologist. For twelve years he gave the weather forecast on Channel Twelve, up until Tracy was nine. Then he died. And now there was David, all glib and superficial, always foolishly trusting the sun. And he was going to walk her down the aisle. Something else her mother insisted on.

Pouring herself another drink, Tracy tried to remember the first time she met David. She knew she was very young. Grandpa John never liked him. *A man ballerina*, he'd grumble. *Who ever heard of such a thing?* She recalled times when he would come by the house when her father was at work, even staying for dinner once or twice, and how, when he'd opened his dance school, her mother had enrolled her immediately and taken her there for classes five days a week. He was always around, but she couldn't remember meeting him for the first time. Before he moved in and took over her father's place at the head of the table and began using his study for his *writing*, although he

never seemed to do much of anything in there but smoke cigars and take visitors, it seemed as though he'd always been around.

Tracy had one truly clear memory of him, from the Christmas party the night her father died. She remembered how he kept disappearing into closed off rooms with her mother, how her father had gone looking for them, how he'd stormed out into the storm without saying goodbye to her. How he'd never come back. How David had stayed.

She remembered getting the news as if it were yesterday. Her father's car skidded into a tree on Highland Road. The snow was falling at a rate of an inch an hour. White-out conditions. She watched the entire news story on Channel Twelve, and then a man who wasn't her father reported the weather.

And that was it. She didn't even remember him leaving the night of the party. He married her mother when Tracy was ten, sold the dance school, and now he was a writer who smoked cigars in her father's study and he was going to walk her down the aisle that night at seven o'clock, at the end of the same aisle where her father's closed casket once sat just days after the storm that took him from her. At the end of the aisle where Rob would be waiting for her.

Rob. She hadn't seen him since the rehearsal dinner the night before. Rob didn't mind the rain. *If I get wet, I get wet*, he said just before he left for the hotel, where he was staying until they officially became husband and wife. *I might get wet on purpose, just to see the look on your mother's face.* That was one of the reasons she was marrying him.

She wasn't sure if she loved him. She'd never had a long-term relationship before. Dating was stressful for her, and with Rob she was relieved to have someone constant to rely on when weddings and social events came up. Everyone liked him, and a lot of things about him did make her smile. He asked her silly questions out of the blue, like "If someone gave you a monkey's paw, and you already knew the story, would you make a wish anyway?" On weekends he always wore the same beat up old t-shirt that said "Procrastinators Unite Tomorrow." And he loved the Red Sox as much as she did. He was a flirt and always seemed to have a flock of females around him, but Tracy told herself he couldn't help it. His charm just seemed to attract people to him.

After he'd stayed with her for almost a year, she knew she would marry him when he asked. Because by then she knew he would ask. Rob loved the good life, but he was a dental school drop-out from a middle class

family on the North shore. He worked on commission as a recruiter for the finance industry and only very occasionally made a good salary. Tracy had a trust fund. She thought he loved her. He probably loved her. But they were marrying young, and she knew it must have at least something to do with money.

Her mother once told her everything had at least a little something to do with money. It was only natural. People all seemed to be seduced by money. She was sure her mother had married not just her father, but his family and his family's history and money. The same history and money David happily inherited when he married her mother, and that Rob would inherit by marrying her. But that was marriage, at least as far as she could tell, a contract, an agreement that bettered one party financially and at least one party emotionally. She could do worse. At least, she thought, Rob seemed to *get* her. He made her feel comfortable, like he understood her, even when the odd thoughts that often formed in her head just came out without warning and everyone else looked at her as though she might end up growing old in her mother's guest house with fifteen cats.

Still, when he proposed on the flight home from a trip to Aruba, she was surprised at how taken aback she was. Rob was outgoing and rather good-looking. Dark hair, so black there was almost a hint of blue, and blue eyes. Very, very blue eyes. The kind of eyes you could almost see in the dark. Even with those eyes, he didn't have movie star good looks, but there was an unconventional charm to his face. Crooked smile, strong chin, a dimple on the left side only. Women loved him, and he knew it.

Tracy, on the other hand, thought herself exceptionally average looking, with no stand-out features, good or bad. Everything about her was just average, in size, shape and color. She had her father's eyes, brown with just a hint of amber, although she didn't seem to share many other traits with either of her parents. Her bone structure was strong, solid, and had been the source of her downfall in ballet. For years she tried to starve herself into the kind of willowy figure her mother had and wanted so badly for her to have, but endless amounts of grapefruit breakfasts and baby field green salads left her with little energy for dancing and finally she just gave up. She was of average height, about five foot four, not short, not tall, and had straight, medium length brown hair. She'd never stood out in a crowd.

But Rob wanted to marry her, and he'd given her an antique-inspired Ascher-cut diamond ring to prove it. It was possible he loved her, but she was at least certain he liked her, so when he turned to her just before the flight attendant arrived with a tray of cold beverages and said "Marry me?" Tracy said yes before she could even consider if she'd made the right choice.

She wondered often. Just the night before, around two AM, she couldn't sleep, so she'd gotten up and started doing sit-ups on the hardwood floor of her childhood bedroom. When she got to one hundred and found she still wasn't tired, she turned on the light and tried to find something on TV, anything to keep her mind from asking questions she'd rather not answer. Of course she would get married tomorrow, she told herself. Everything was set. The out-of-town guests had already arrived at their hotels. Two days ago they'd paid an enormous amount of money to get an emergency fitting for her gown because she'd lost more weight since the final fitting two weeks before. The honeymoon suite at the Plaza was booked and paid for. Of course she would get married. It was all arranged.

Sometimes she wondered what her father would have thought of Rob. He probably would have liked him. They would talk about sports and Rob would probably even politely listen to ramblings about dew points and atmospheric pressure. But they were so different. Rob was laid back, relaxed. He walked around as if he always had plenty of time, as if tomorrow was too far off to concern him. *You can't control the weather, Tracy,* he always said, *so why bother worrying about it.*

She couldn't help it though. When her father was alive, he was always concerned with tomorrow even though he couldn't change it. It was his job to tell people what was going to happen, so every minute of every day was spent thinking about the next day. He would have known days beforehand that there was a ninety-percent chance it would rain on her wedding day, and it would have worried him.

Finishing her drink, Tracy realized that soon her bridesmaids would be arriving, along with someone her mother had hired to do her hair and make-up. She only had another hour or so to be alone. She walked over to one of the built-in floor to ceiling bookcases where her parents' wedding album was kept and pulled it from its place amidst other family albums and Tracy's baby books. The maids dusted every day, even along the top shelves that were almost seventeen feet from

the floor, and she marveled at how impossible it was to tell that the album hadn't been opened for fifteen years, probably much longer. Her father had died just before Christmas, 1983, and he had married her mother almost exactly thirteen years before that, just before he'd gotten the job at Channel Twelve. He'd lived in this house his whole life, and when her mother moved in, she was probably the one who placed the album on the shelf in the library. Tracy liked to imagine they sat together sometimes looking at it, at least early on in their marriage, but she knew the album hadn't been opened at all since David moved in.

In the photograph on the first page, her mother wore an ivory fur muff and cape over her long dress. She reminded Tracy of the snow queen in a story from her childhood. She was beautiful, with her long black hair swept up into an elegant up-do, held in place by a crystal-studded tiara, her red lips a brilliant slice of color against all the white. Behind her stood Tracy's father, his arms encircling her waist as they posed in front of a window. Tracy noticed her father wasn't smiling. Behind them, through the window, she could see the snow.

As she was flipping through the pages, there was a knock on the library door, and before she answered, David came in.

"Nervous?" he asked. His wide, presumptuous smile irritated her. She shrugged and put the album down. David glanced at it.

"Well, I am," he said. "You mother invited half the state. Last time I was in one of these things, I didn't have to walk down the aisle in front of everyone. I just had to stand there and wait for everyone to come to me."

"I know," Tracy said. "I was there." She put the album back in place on the shelf and walked back toward the bar. David nodded at her to pour him a drink. Just like old times, she thought.

She was hoping he wouldn't stay. She'd been enjoying the time to herself and she had little to say to him anyway. In fourteen years, she'd never grown close to him. He'd always tried, offering her and her friends rides to the mall, buying her gifts, never complaining when she monopolized the pool or played the stereo too loud. He really wasn't a bad guy, but she was always wary. She could hear her father's voice warning her. *There's a storm brewing.* She couldn't remember her father and David together. They never seemed to be in the same room. But she was sure she knew he never liked him. It was like some memory she knew she'd had at one time, and even though it had faded, she was

still certain it had been there and it had been real.

"David, there you are." Her mother sounded annoyed as she entered the room. "You were supposed to leave a half hour ago." She looked at Tracy. "The girls are here, they're ready to do your hair. Are you drinking?" She rolled her eyes and took the drink from David's hand, setting it down on the bar. "Let's go. We're on a tight schedule today."

"I know, I know." He was still smiling. Tracy was annoyed. "I'm coming. Just give me a minute." As soon as her mother left the room, he turned back to Tracy. "Listen," he said, picking his drink back up and taking a sip. "I have something for you. I know this is a tough day for you." He glanced toward the shelf where Tracy had replaced the album. "But every bride needs 'something borrowed.' Fifteen years ago, I borrowed something from your father, and never got the chance to give it back. Now I'm giving it to you. Fifteen years, I guess it counts as 'something old' too."

The envelope he placed in her hand was thick and unsealed. As she opened it, a rage she hadn't expected and couldn't explain burned up into her throat. "Get out," she told him, looking him directly in the eye, "Now."

For the first time, he looked defeated, as though he had never anticipated the reaction he would get but instantly understood once it happened. Without protest, he left the room, taking his drink with him.

She thought she heard the rain pick up again as she remembered the night, just after her engagement, when her mother told her the whole story, how she'd been in love with David since childhood but her parents had forced her to break it off because David was poor, and worse, he was a ballet dancer with no other prospects. He'd joined a dance troupe and was gone for years, but just before her parents' marriage he'd come home, and that's when the affair began. "Your father could have put an end to it," she'd said, "if he'd loved me enough. Maybe I would have ended it if he'd asked. But he didn't. He let it go on for years. He knew before we were married. Maybe he thought he couldn't change my mind, or maybe he just knew his family would never have allowed the wedding to be called off. His mother, she wouldn't

suffer that kind of humiliation. Whatever his reasons, he didn't say anything at all." Tracy remembered it was raining that night too, and they were sitting in the library. As she refilled their drinks and listened to her mother, it all became clear, all those photographs of her father never smiling, always looking like he was watching for storm clouds. "He knew, and I knew he knew," she remembered her mother saying "But nobody wanted a scandal. So long as we appeared to have a happy marriage, so long as no one else knew..." She shook her head then, a mix of disgust and confusion on her face. There was a long pause. "But you," she said to Tracy, finally, her voice tinged with bourbon, "You've never had anyone else. You're starting with a clean slate. And you're lucky. My mother always told me, she said, first time you marry, do it for money. You don't have to marry for money."

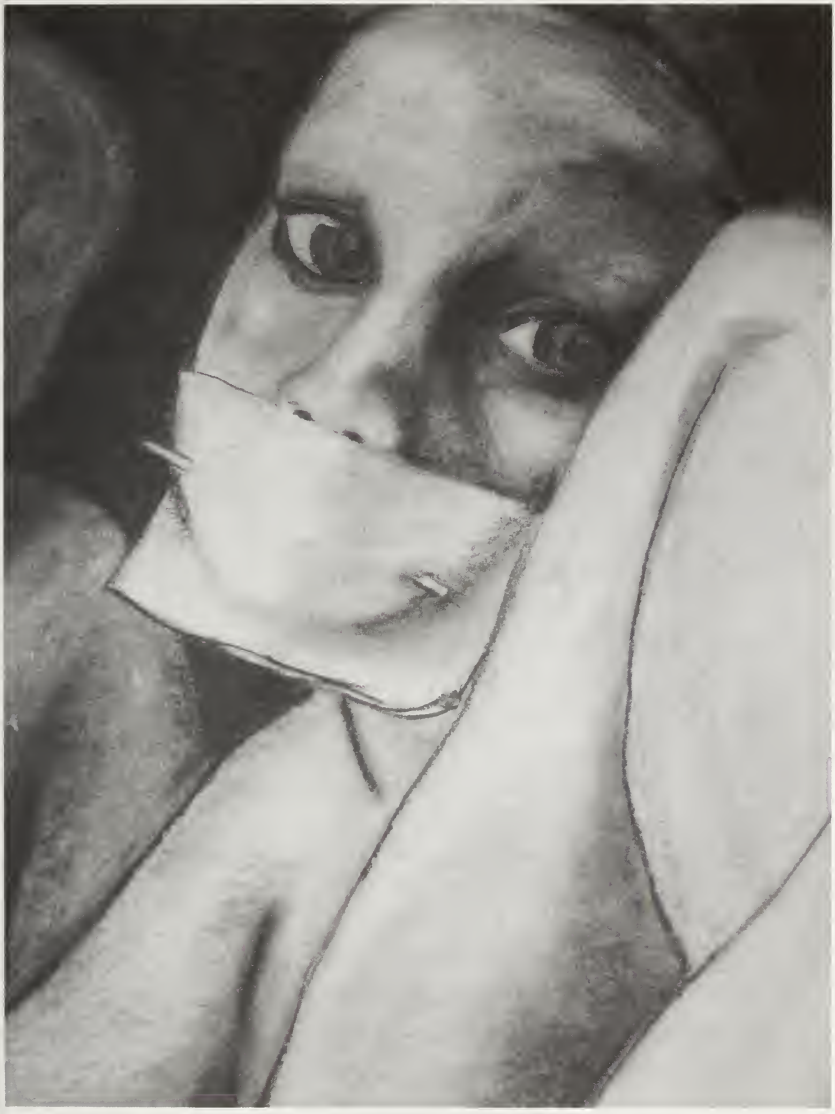
Now Tracy understood more than ever that her mother had married for precisely that reason. And so had David. She looked down at the thick envelope. He hadn't told her what it was, but he didn't have to. Her mother already had. The night in the library, after the rain had ended. She could almost smell the humid air blowing in on the cool night breeze as she remembered her mother's final revelation, that David had moved back to town to be close to her, how he'd opened up the ballet school with her money he'd borrowed from her father. Every day, while Tracy struggled with her hour long dance lessons, her mother and David would steal away to be alone.

She pulled the crisp bills out and counted them. Ten thousand dollars in cash, all neatly stacked, the heads of all the presidents all facing the same way. Deep down she knew it was his way of absolving his sin, as if repaying his debt would allow him a fresh start.

She looked out the window. The sun was still there; it just hung a bit lower in the sky now, following the same course it took day after day. Everything was a pattern. She saw that now. She thought of Rob, in his rented tux, waiting for her by the alter, his smile making every woman in the church look twice and wonder if they'd get to dance with him at the reception. The aisle glittering with artificial snow. The guests all waiting, dressed in designer labels, whispering about her when they thought no one could hear, their talk turning to the weather or the upcoming millennium as soon as someone else was in earshot. Her mother walking arm and arm with David, flashing a simulated red smile, assuring everyone that all was well, everything would get started

shortly. Tracy put the envelope in her pocket and headed out of the library. Slowly, as if on cue, the rain started again.

Erica Johnson



Untitled

Becky Bishop

Khoreji

Trying to buy cucumbers in a mad sea
of open-air shops, I came face to face
with a vender, staring blatantly at my khoreji
visage. He grinned and gawked, I took my time
to count the change, escaping from his sight
as the blaze climbed up my neck, the white neck of a stranger.

But it was more than being just a stranger.
In their blind assumptions they forgot to see
me, except as a spectacle, a prime tourist site
right there in their own native land. My face
was still a blank to them; in time
they might have known me but for now I could only be a Khoreji.

I can hear the beautiful scarred children chanting "Khoreji, Khoreji,"
as I walked their dusty streets. Surely I was not stranger
to them than all the rest... "Khello! Vat eez yor name? Vat time
Eez eet?" each clammering for ruthless courtesy,
innocently spelling out the law condemning the different face
to isolated otherness for life, though not by any law that they could cite.

I was so much like them; I always thought I could incite
them to believe it. I did not dress like a khoreji;
I went out fully cloaked, headscarf often masking half my face.
I did not eat the foreign foods that looked no stranger
than theirs did to me at first. They could see
that I drank tea and ate rice spiced with cumin, saffron, thyme,

and went to the hamaam or took a bucket-bath in wintertime…
But it was the veil that obscured their sight,
the veil of the un-infringed indigenous, unsee-
ing eye that will not know the truth about the Khoreji
from the lie, until a word like "friend" replaces "stranger"
so the shielding mask can drop from her familiar face.

I though one must be brave to face
the fact of otherness during one's time
as a khoreji. But by the end I was not such a stranger;
I had friends and we had each shared insight
with each other on the nature of the khoreji
phenomenon, and laughed at how initially neither could see

the other's face. After nine month's time
I returned to the land of khorejis, glad not to be a foreign sight,
but found only a mass of strangers seeming not to see.

Rebecca Perry

Girl

Melissa van Hamme

Thanksgiving 1985

spent Thanksgiving of my sixteenth year eating processed turkey off plastic tray at my father's rehab. I told everyone he was away on usiness. I didn't want my cover blown. I avoided having friends over t my house so that nobody would see the dingy grey indoor-outdoor arpet of our living room, the cat scratched furniture, and the smelly erosene heater that warmed the downstairs.

There was no escape from the reality of Central Maine Medical enter. We made our way down the linoleum floored hallway that ad that unmistakable, institutionalized smell of boxed mashed potato akes, public bathrooms and disinfectant.

My brothers and I sat across from him on folding chairs, frozen miles over the cheap, paper table cloth held in place with scotch tape, nsteady fans of cardboard turkeys meeting our eyes in a way that we ould not meet his.

I tried not to see the trembling hands that brought too small, white lastic forks of squash to mouths that couldn't eat. Tried not to see the agging knee highs that revealed a set of spindly legs crisscrossed with aricose veins. "Drunk legs," my brothers laughingly called them.

A pretty blonde girl around my age came up behind my father nd threw her arms around him. She kissed his cheek. "We love Bob ere. He's our inspiration". I hated her for the casual way she touched im, the way she saw something in him that I could not. I hated him or the flush of his cheeks and that sheepish grin. I wondered if she ould find him so inspirational if she saw my mother hit his drunken ss with the ice cream scoop while we numbly watched Vanna turn owels.

After the stiff hugs, my Ma and brothers turned the corner to the xit. Something drew me back to his room. I stood halfway in the oor frame. My father sat on the edge of his white starched bed, hands olded on the lap of his always pristinely creased dress pants. Except or the uneven jerking of his slumped shoulders, all was motionless.

I turned away and walked to the elevator, repeatedly jabbing the lready lit button. Down.

Abdurrahman Wahab

The Wedding Suit

Today is Reman's wedding and you are shedding tears again. You hoped that your cheeks would be dry at least this morning before the wedding. Twenty-three years of grief and waiting has been a heavy burden. You hoped that the pain would end this morning for good. But it seems that this morning is the worst of all the other mornings of the last twenty-three years. This morning has realization; the others have had hope.

You usually wake up while it is still dark. You establish your morning prayer, read a little from the Qur'an, kiss it, and then put it back on the shelf. Then you go to the window and watch the rising of the sun. You grieve for yourself, for your son, for his missing father, and for all those men who have asked for your hand after your husband was gone. Your sleep is a lifetime of shadows, of endless waiting, and of unfinished images. This time you didn't sleep all night. You couldn't.

You are sitting at the window looking at the empty, gray street. The drops on your side of the glass start sliding down as the sun rises from behind the foggy mountain chain far from Erbil City. The sunbeams hit your irises and you lower your eyes. The front yard is still dark. Spots of leftover snow are scattered on the grass. You like the front yard because it changes each time you look at it through the window. The grass sometimes turns yellow, frozen under the snow. When the snow melts and the light hits the blades, they gradually absorb life again. Although when they shed their leaves or lose their flowers, the trees and shrubs look exhausted and worn out, they are nevertheless lucky because they are so only for a short period of time. The garden eventually changes with the seasons. This is something you cannot say for yourself.

The flowers are not out yet. Green and maroon leaves have started to cover the shrubs. You see the trees with a mixture of different colors each time. You see a dark-green background within the leaves, deep and dark turquoise spots neighboring other yellowish-green spots. Pure white snow is making a blanket for clusters of frozen leaves. You

ee dark brown branches cutting through the green surface, linking ll the different shades like streets on a city map. Threads of sunlight tart to shred the deep green shade in the background, illuminating he snow covering some of the leaves within the trees. Now the trees hine from within, as if life has blown a magical breath into them. The ght starts to tickle the grass. You can see the reflection in the dew. You ke the morning clothes the trees wear; they dress to please the rising un.

Twenty-three years. You can't believe that such a long time has lready passed. You want to look back into the past and see what has eally happened since Heval stepped out of your life, since he said his ıst goodbye. It feels like your own wedding with Heval was only a few ears ago. In few hours it will be your son's wedding.

Time goes fast, you think. You remember the morning of your wedling day. You rose early after a night of interrupted sleep. You prayed, ead from the Qur'an, kissed it, and put it back in its place among the ther books on the bookshelf. You stayed on the praying mat longer han usual, praying and thinking. You were not nervous. You were not cared. You were happy, but it was a different kind of happiness. There vas a feeling of an unknown future mixed with the happiness. You vere sure about what you were doing, and Heval was the man you lreamed of living with. Although you had known each other for only few months, you thought you knew him well.

Love is strange. It drives you to do things you could never imagine ourself doing. Love is a force driving you wherever it wants, and you ıave to submit. But no; love is nothing you submit to. It is what people ay about it all the time. You thought that you knew Heval as you knew ourself. You were not afraid of living with Heval. You knew that you vere capable of loving, that you could love and be loved. What is love, nyway, but a field that needs constant care to bear fruit, you believed.

"Mom, are you awake?" Reman's voice comes faintly after a couple f knocks on your bedroom door.

Of course I am awake, you sigh to yourself. You are awake every ight before any wedding, whether it is yours, your son's, or even your eighbor's or one of the teachers who work for you. You usually spend he nights thinking about the two months of your life that preceded he twenty-three years of your death. You didn't know that you'd been ead before and after those two months you spent with Heval twenty-

three years ago. Two months of life. Then Heval left. Eight months later you gave life to your son. And then you died.

"Mom," the voice comes again followed by three faint knocks. "Where did you put the wedding suit? Do you have it in there with you?"

You still don't answer. You force yourself to leave the window and slowly walk over to open the door. You wipe your eyes and cheeks along the way.

"Good morning, my young man. I see you're awake early today?"

He has a smile on his face. He peeks over your shoulder into your room as if looking for something.

"Mom, the suit?" His eyes are still scanning the room. Then he looks at you. "Are you going to give it to me now?"

You put your hands on his shoulder, raise yourself and kiss his forehead before you embrace him.

"Are you okay, Mom?"

"Of course I am. I'm just happy for you." Your voice is about to fail you. But you tighten your embrace as a way to hide your shaking voice. It is his big day and you don't want to spoil it, not even with tears of joy. "Don't worry. I'll give it to you after breakfast."

He kisses the top of your head and goes downstairs. He has his father's stature. Taller than you. You see everything of Heval in him. Sometimes you can't believe that Heval is away. He is there in Reman's flesh.

The wedding suit. You go towards the wardrobe. You stretch your right arm to open it, but find yourself looking into the mirror along the door. Your face is pale. Your eyes are a little swollen and red. You wipe your cheeks few times with both hands. You rub your cheeks a little. They can still blush, but the reddish color fades away sooner than it used to. You look closer into the mirror and into your eyes. Little pink veins have webbed your eyes. The corners have become like tilled grounds. The wrinkles have grown deeper. You are changing fast these days, you think. You are getting paler and paler everyday. Life is withering within you faster than before. Your nut-brown hair now has streaks of grey. You can't believe how fast the few white strands turned into shades of silver. You think you had to dye your hair, dark brown or henna may be, at least for your son's wedding. But you like to stay as you naturally are. You don't want to fake your life, not even with hair

ye. Besides, the whites in your hair and the wrinkles around your eyes :mind you of where you are in your life. Your face tells you who you :e.

You stop staring at your face and open the wardrobe. You look to ıe left side. A number of shelves. Colorful underwear. You grab the eeping gowns. You close the wardrobe and lay down the underwear n one side of the bed. You look into the mirror again, holding the ıdigo blue undergarment along your body. You swing left and right, hecking whether or not it will fit you. You bought the indigo blue un-ergarment many years ago when you thought that you would prob-ɔly live again. You had the chance to find happiness again after Heval :ft you in misery, but obstacles started to pop up from everywhere. How many years ago that was, you can hardly tell. It was six years after Heval left you before you bought new clothes for yourself. You also ·ied on the old nightgowns you had and they still fit you, although ıey were a little tight. They could still do. Now you have gained more veight and more wrinkles. You no longer have the slim body and the areful curves on both sides of your waist. You have lost the tightness f your skin, the color, and the touch. Your body is withering fast. ut you still swing left and right in front of the mirror, like that early ıorning before your wedding twenty-three years ago.

You put down the blue undergarment, slowly look into the other ieces, then grab the pearl satin sleeping gown. It was Heval's present ɔr you a week before the wedding. He said he'd like you to wear it for our first night together. You hold it in front of you, but the moment ou see yourself in the mirror, you quickly throw it back on the bed. ou quickly collect the other pieces. You think that you have been cting silly. How much longer do you need to mature before you stop cting like a young girl? Besides, it is your son's special day today. No eed to look into the past.

You open the wardrobe again and neatly place the undergarments n their shelves. On the right side, there are your hijabs and heads-arves, arranged according to the seasons, from thick to the thinner nes. You think which one would be good to wear for the wedding. hen you remember that you have decided to go with the traditional urdish attire Reman has bought you for his special day. "I want Sazan ɔ see what a pretty woman she is going to live with in the house," Re-ıan said when you told him that you didn't need new cloths. "Moth-

er-in-laws need to be gorgeous at their son's parties," he said with a whimsical smile. He kissed your hands and you his forehead.

At the end of the cupboard is the suit. It is wrapped in a clear plastic bag. It is a beige suit that has been hanging there for twenty-three years.

"Mom," Reman's voice comes back, this time from farther. He is down stairs. "Auntie is here."

You grab the suit from the cupboard and lay it down on the bed, look at it for a few seconds, and then leave the room. You slowly close the door behind you, and go downstairs.

"So today's going to be the last day you make breakfast for yourself…" you hear Tara's voice on your way to the bathroom. When you enter the kitchen, you see Reman's back to her. He is at the stove preparing breakfast. Tara is still speaking about preparations, guests, late arrivals, the bride, and her family. There is a complaining tone in her voice about the latter. Reman seems silent, unwilling to participate in the conversation.

"Thanks for coming so early, Tara," you tell Reman's aunt. She turns around and greets you. She is sitting on the table in the kitchen, and has helped herself to a cup of tea.

"Look at our young bridegroom, he is cooking on his wedding day," Tara says while sipping from the hot tea. "Come sit down here, young man. That is not your type of work."

You smile. Reman has been helping you in the house since he was a child. You have taught him to depend on himself and to be proud of cleaning the place where he lives. You have spoken to him about his father, who he has seen in photos only. Heval used to help you with the house during the few times when he was not away. He didn't want you to serve him while he was sitting around in the house. *It's not something to be ashamed of, he used to say. I do my laundry, cook for myself and for others, and sweep the ground all the time when I am on duty*, he used to say. *I am* sharing *my life with you, right?* he used to say before placing a warm kiss on your lips.

You ask Tara about her mother, Reman's grandmother. She is fine, Tara says.

You go to the sink, rinse two cups with tap water, and pour some tea from the teapot on the stove. Reman is frying some eggs, enough for both of you. The fire under the pan is a little high; the oil is spar-

ling.

"Careful with the fire," you tell Reman. He turns the stove off. The ggs are ready.

"So what color is your suit?" Tara asks Reman once you both sit own on the table to eat.

Reman looks at you, throws a bite of the egg wrapped with bread nto his mouth. "I guess it is off-white…" His eyes are still on you. You ook back at him, and assure him about his answer. You know what ara will say next.

"Why not black? Aren't wedding suits supposed to be black with hite shirts?"

On your own wedding, Heval told you when he saw the surprised ook on your face that his parents and friends told him that too. You magined him in a coal-black suit, white shirt and a bright maroon ecktie. You imagined him the most handsome man ever wearing that edding suit. When he appeared in front of you in a completely dif- erent color, you realized how mistaken you were. No one could have ver competed with Heval's charm in the beige suit, the dark maroon atin shirt and the coal-black necktie. You were happy that you were nistaken. You needed the surprise to release the tension from all the yes that were on you, making you blush from bashfulness. You know nat Reman might need to surprise his bride as well.

"He is going to wear his father's wedding suit," you tell Tara, while ooking into Reman's eyes. It gives you so much pleasure and pride to elate Reman to his father. You can see Heval in Reman's eyes. Reman's ace has the complexions of his father's. The relatives can't see it much. ara sometimes pretends to see the resemblance. But you know that nly you can see your husband in your son's eyes.

"Do you still have that old suit? Hasn't it tattered yet? Oh my God, must be very old-fashioned. So what time are we going to the bride's ouse? Have you told her family about the time? We have to take her nd go to the park right away. Many guests and friends of the family ill be at the park waiting. Don't stay too long inside the house. People ill look down at you. The guests will be here pretty soon. You don't ense the passage of time. Have you gone to the barbershop yet?" Tara eeps asking questions without waiting for the answers. Neither of you other to answer. She walks around the house, looks into the guests' oom, and inspects the front yard from the window. Her voice is still

floating around.

Reman wants to take the dishes to the sink and wash them. You tell him to go upstairs to your room and take the suit to his bedroom and try it on.

"Is it going to fit me?"

You assure him that it is. He kisses your cheeks. He kisses your forehead. You embrace him from his waist. You tap on his back. He leaves you in the kitchen and goes upstairs. You take the plates into the sink and turn the tap on. A flow of water starts to slide on the greasy dishes.

Heval used to wash the dishes during those days when he was home. As long as he was doing it on duty, why not doing it for you, he used to say. He always had a nice way of saying things. Five months of engagement and two months of marriage was never enough time to know a person, to become so much attached to him the way you were attached to Heval. Sometimes you wonder that if this was really so. Sometimes you feel that you are chasing a vacuum of feelings. Who knows, may be if you were together for a longer period, things might have changed between you. Feelings might have worn out. Nice way of saying things might have had a different taste. Don't you remember the arguments, the disagreements and the little fights? You sure were not perfect for each other. You were just like all the other people. It is only the taste of the beginning that you are holding on to so much, even when twenty-three years have passed. You can't possibly know a person the way you think you knew Heval in such a short period of time.

You are entangled with the memories of loneliness and the pain of waiting. Sometimes you are not sure whether Heval was real at all, whether the time that you spent together really occurred. It was the best time though. Those two months were like a complete lifetime. You felt that you knew what life meant. You could say that living was only when you were together, one completing the other. So he completed you. Did you complete him? Why then did he have to leave you so early?

You put the washed dishes aside. You put the cups upside down to drain. You wipe your hands with the towel hanging over the wall near the fridge. The bathroom door is closed, but there is no sound from within. Tara must be using the mirror to put all those different shades

n her face. You don't know what she is trying to do with all those olors at her age. She probably doesn't know either; just following the shion of the day. You slowly go upstairs. Reman's bedroom door is osed. You stop in front of the door for a while, looking at the knob. eman will soon share the room with a woman. They will start their fe in that room. Reman's door will be closed more often from now on. [e will spend more time in that room than in the house. From now on is happiness will be there behind that closed door.

You pass Reman's closed door and enter your room. Twenty-three ears ago, the room was both yours and Heval's. You shared a room ith a man for two months. Now it has been twenty-three years of are naring it with grief and waiting, and you will probably be doing so for ne rest of your life. Sometimes you hate your room, especially at night. he loneliness of nights is unbearable. The room grows cold, silent, and ark. Sometimes it is so dark and silent that you can't sleep. Sometimes ou don't want to sleep because of the dreams you see. You don't know hen this will end.

The suit is not on the bed. Reman must be trying it on. The black ecktie was not with the suit. Thanks to Tara who used it as a rope o tie some stupid carpet with when you sold the carpet along with me other furniture during the International economical embargo n Iraq and the high prices of food. You and your son have endured me tough times, you know. What made those times tougher was nat you had to go through them without a husband and a father. Re- nan, then a ten-year-old boy, wouldn't understand where his father as. You, then a twenty-nine-year-old single mother, were not sure hether your husband was dead or alive.

You still don't know. You go to the window, the same window that as been your companion watching the sun rising for twenty-three ears.

Have all those years really passed? You can't believe it. Sometimes feels like it was only yesterday, so near a time that you feel you still ave Heval's touch on your skin, his tight embrace around you, that ou can still feel his distinctive scent in your nostrils. Some other times feels like it was a forgotten dream, like something never happened. ou think that your head is faking the experience, that the memories re only a composition from people's tales and talks mixed with your reams. But you have the photos. You have the suit. You have Reman.

These are proofs of a lifetime that is certainly not a work of imagination. Your memories are from a past that struggles to be forgotten, and you don't want to let go.

You know well that it is futile to look back into the past. Heval is not there for you, and he never will be. He is only with you inside the photo album. He is in the framed photo on the table beside your bed. He is inside your head. He is inside your son. Twenty-three years? That is a long time to hold on to someone when you don't know for sure whether he is dead or alive. It is crazy, you know that. You just can't help it.

You are at the window again. You are looking at the street in the direction where you last saw Heval's face. You go to the window every time and imagine how it would be if he were there. You have those images of him carrying the khaki military bag over his shoulder, turning around every now and then as he walked away. He said that his unit commander wouldn't give him anymore time to come home. Your honeymoon was over. *It is wartime, and those Iranian bastards have increased their attacks on the borders*, the commander told Heval. *I might run away with the first chance I get*, Heval said the night before he left you for good. *It is a crazy war between two crazy systems,* he told you. *Why should we burn ourselves and others for the bullshit of the leaders?* he said, lowering his voice unconsciously. *I will come back soon and we might need to leave Erbil and go to some faraway village. We will acclimate with the village life until this war is over,* he assured you. *We're not the only people doing that anyway,* he said before he kissed your neck and held you tight under the blanket.

Early in the morning just before sunrise you said goodbye to him at the front door. He had the khaki bag on his shoulder. He was turning around every five meters to see you still waving. You wanted to give him the news about the life that had started to bud inside you, but you decided to tell him when he came back. During your engagement, Heval left you several times to go on duty. After your two-week honeymoon, he used to come back for the weekends. But you wouldn't stop worrying about the time when he was going to say goodbye to you again. The last time he left, you were happy that it was the last time. And it was.

"Wow, you look great. Lucky girl who's going to have you," came Tara's voice from behind the door. "Go show yourself to your Mom."

A knock on the door. "Naza, come out and see your young man out here."

You look at the wedding photo beside your bed. Heval, standing beside

ou in his wedding suit, is smiling to you. *It is your son outside,* you hisper to the photo. *You would have been proud of him,* you tell Heval's hoto.

You open the door. He is standing in front of you, in his flesh and lood. You can't believe your eyes. You knew he was still alive. You were ire. You never gave up hope. You never listened to all the nonsense ou've been hearing from family and friends for twenty-three years to ive up hope. He came back to you as he had promised.

"So, what do you think?" Reman looks at you, at Tara, then down t himself. "It fits. Perfect."

"Ok, now take it off." You are still looking up and down at him. You need to go to the hairstylist after you take a shower. The guests ill be here very soon." You tap on Reman's chest.

"Oh, what is that? A stain?"

"Let me see." You look at where Reman points. "Yeah, no problem. 's not showing much."

"Why is it there? What is it anyway?" Reman tries to scratch the tain on the pant with his index finger. It doesn't go.

"It's a Pepsi stain. Don't worry, it's not showing much." Tara leans own to see if she can remove it. "I said don't worry about it. Let it be." our voice gets a little desperate. You try to change the subject. "Tara, ould you do me a favor? Can you call my brother and see if they are nywhere near the city? See if everything is alright. His wife gets a ttle dizzy on the road. You know, she always throws up in the car."

You get inside and close the door behind you. You open the door gain. Tara is on the stairs. "Oh, and make sure the bathroom is tidy. Guests might need to use it." You give her a gentle smile.

It is too much and you can't hold it anymore. You have been holding it for twenty-three years now. You have been swallowing your grief, ushing your tears inside as much as you can. You can't take all this in ne day. Sunrise, wedding preparations, the undergarments, the wedding suit, the stain, everything. It is too much. The stain. Are you serious? You have kept even the stain on Heval's wedding suit. He got that tain on your wedding day. You were holding the glasses for each other, rms crossed in order for the other to have a sip. He blew a smile into ne glass.

Cars start to make a noise in front of the house. You hear people lking and laughing. They must be Reman's friends. They will take

him to the barbershop. You go to the window again to look. Who knows whom you might see!

Tara is a beautiful woman. At least she was when she was much younger. Although old age has left its mark on her, one can see the traces of prettiness she once had. You both at least have that in common. Actually both of you are without men, too. She got divorced a long time ago. She was barren. She lost her worth and her love. She didn't want to be the wife of a man who had another wife. She said it was not her fault. The man was a waterless land. Nothing would ever grow from him, she said. She preferred to be divorced rather than share the same man with another woman. She started a grudge against all men. She felt a jealousy of all women. She became an anti-marriage woman, one that rejected any type of relationship with men. Some relatives started to call her a sorceress when her ex-husband remained childless with his second wife. She says it is God's justice.

It was already six years after Heval had said his last goodbye to you when you thought that it was okay to go on with life. You never had any intention of forgetting Heval, as Tara accused you. *He was her dear brother*, she yelled. Well, he was your dear life, you thought. She didn't have the right to accuse you of anything. It was her grudge against happiness. It was her jealousy against your opportunity. You ended the matter by a slap that burned like ember on her cheek.

"If he really loved me," you said after a moment of silence following the slap, "he wouldn't have gone and left me alone in this world."

She was mad, steaming like a bull in front of a red curtain. She was ready to attack you. You were ready to attack back.

"He doesn't deserve to be remembered," you said with a firm tone before you showed Tara the way out.

This happened in a late Thursday afternoon, and you kept thinking during the weekend. You had your decision. Hope seemed to be futile. Happiness for you was unwanted. The next Saturday when you saw Miran coming out of the class, you didn't wish to talk to him. But he did.

"Salamu Alaikum, Nazanin. How did the class go?"

"As usual. Endless headache. How about you?" You really wanted to be polite and ask about him more than your willingness to start a conversation. When you first met two years after Heval left, Miran

was the principle of the school, and you were a new teacher. You started working in that school four years ago as a teacher of Kurdish. You thought teaching would be a good way to ease the pain of waiting. Reman was only sixteen months old then, and you could leave him with his divorced and childless aunt for a few hours three days a week. You had a B.A. in Kurdish language and literature. You at least had the house that Heval bought for both of you one month after your engagement. The teaching stipend was enough to help you and your child go by, especially later during the tough years of the economical embargo.

"Yeah, they are noisy, as usual," said Miran looking at the crowded classroom full of fifth graders. "Listen, I've received the agreement letter from the Ministry's Education Advisor about the salary raise. It will need your signature, too."

It took you three years to become the vice principle. Miran depended on you to run the school and keep the children quiet. You had your special touch with the kids, Miran used to say to you. He was a thirty-two-year-old, half bald man, seven years older than yourself, never married. *Waiting for the right person*, he used to say. He was good looking for someone of that age and still a bachelor. *Sometimes it just doesn't happen*, he said, raising his shoulders and gently waving his hands around. *Marriage is a matter of fate. You never know the whens, the whos and the hows*, he said, showing confidence in what he thought. He was quiet and gentle. He was respectable, treating everyone as he treated himself. He had a degree in Education with five years of teaching experience in the villages close to the Iranian border. Surviving the naughty village children was harder than surviving the snow of the mountains, he said. He also had a nice way of saying things.

You started to feel attracted to Miran soon, but the realization came a little late during the second year of teaching in the school. It was when the dreams started to turn wired that you thought there was something wrong with you. Dreams of seeing Heval on the threshold started to disturb you. He was always on the threshold and nowhere else, and always saying goodbye even before you started welcoming him back. He was in a constant departure, in a continuous disappearance. You were tired of your dreams and unfinished greetings. But the real disturbance started when Heval's face started to change while standing on the threshold just before saying his goodbyes. His face was turning into another face, a familiar face, but you were not sure exactly whose face was it. It took you some time to realize that Heval's new face was actually that of the principle of the school, Mi-

ran. At first you considered this an alert of some sort of danger, danger of forgetting Heval, danger of losing hope in his return, and perhaps danger of losing your mind. Then Miran opened the matter and told you that he started to think about marriage only after he knew you. He said that you were the only person that made him think about himself. He said that you were like a mirror and he was the person standing in front of it. You were a little angry when you heard these words, and didn't utter a word. You were afraid that your silence might be understood as approval, but you just didn't know what to say. A slap on Miran's face wouldn't do; you were both adults. Saying anything might have ruined any kind of friendship you had had. Silence was the safest means of reaction.

He said he liked you sooner, but never wanted to show it very much. He knew that you were waiting for Heval. After two years of teaching in the same school with Miran, you started to wonder what you were doing with your life. You were torn. You were married to Heval. But Heval was not there. Who were you married to then? You were a married and an unmarried woman at the same time. You couldn't live your life either way. Besides, Reman needed to be protected. Which way for him and you was best, you were not sure.

"So, have you decided about what I told you?" Miran didn't raise his head, and kept looking into the folder in front of him. He was a little nervous. You were scared.

"Look, Miran. I know you, and I know that you are an understanding person. My situation is a little complicated." You sat down on the armchair in front of his desk. You had the Education Advisor's letter in your hand and pretended to be scanning through it. You wished he didn't touch on the subject. "I am still married, you know. We still don't know anything about Heval. Dead or alive. There has been no news since we knew he was captured by the Iranians."

"But what about you? You know you are still alive. You know that for sure." Miran closed the file and calmly tapped on the table.

"I am not sure about that either. Sorry." It was time for the next class. You left the room after you signed the paper.

You didn't know how that day ended. You felt like you were an apparition on the bus all the way from the school to pick up Reman in his grandparents' house. You had to pick him up there and take him home. It was his shower day.

The shower was a good place to weep, to weep for yourself, for Heval, for Reman, and for Miran. Reman didn't know what was going on. "Are you crying for daddy?" Reman always said when seeing you shedding tears. "No, it is the steam," you would reply. It was all absurd and meaningless. You didn't deserve to suffer. Miran also didn't deserve to suffer. What about Heval, where was he? Why wasn't he there for you? You were tired of the uncertainty about him. You wished he was dead, finished, buried. Waiting was torment. Death was conclusion. End was relaxation. You wept for wishing Heval's death. You were torn.

The years following Miran's marriage proposal went easier. Certainty about your future started to congeal. "No" was the answer for all who proposed. "No" was the red barbed boundary drawn around you. Tara most of all was the person who ensured the clarity of the red line. Heval's parents took silence as their support for Tara. Your parents and siblings didn't want to deal with your troubles. They were not feeding you and your child. They were not providing you with life support and care. "You are Heval's wife," they said. "Heval's not there, then you belong to his parents. Besides, where is your faithfulness to your man? Don't disrepute us anymore than you do. Having no protector is not enough already?" they said.

You sent them all to hell. God was your constant call. Your son was His mercy.

"Okay, Mom, I'm back." Reman rushes into the kitchen. You are busy arranging the overhead cabinets. You turn around and look at him. You keep silent. He waits for you to say something. You wish he wouldn't wait for you to say something. He is there, standing in front of you, in his flesh and blood. He has cut his hair like his father did for your wedding, with some gel that shines on the blackness. He has left a thin beard, has trimmed his cheeks and neck. He is wearing a deep black necktie. He must have known what you were thinking when you told him about the suit.

"You're my life, son," you tell Reman while you approach him and tap on his arm.

"Have the relatives arrived yet? Uncle and aunt? You know we should be going in about half an hour." Reman looks into his nickel watch his fiancé has bought for him. "I don't want to leave Sazan on fire. Waiting is hard for women, you know."

You look into his eyes. You don't say anything. You are scanning your son in the twenty-three-year-old beige wedding suit. Your eyes stop. You don't see the stain on the pant anymore. You look closer. No, it is not there. Reman must have cleaned it.

You pass by him and go upstairs to get ready.

"Mom," Reman's voice comes from behind. "I love you Mom. You're still the best."

Erica Johnson

Autoritratto

Anonymous

Sacrifice

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award Winner

"Why won't you meet him?" she asked, quizzically.
"I don't know," I answered, wishing she would just stop.

She wanted me to meet an old man that came into her work. While I was away, he came in to tell her to thank me for my service to the country. He told her that it was people like me that were keeping us safe. As he was proclaiming his respect for my self-sacrifice, his eyes would well up with tears. Most times, he couldn't even finish his thoughts; the emotions would just be too much and would take over. As he left he would ask her to mention him in her letters to me, to let me know people back at home loved and supported me. Every day this man did this, and I wanted nothing more than to avoid him.

"Why won't you meet him? It would make him so happy...he looks up to you! Every day he tells me how proud of you he is."

At that moment a familiar face flashed through my mind. It was the face of a man I barely knew. I met him while on a maintenance trip. His vehicle needed a new engine and it was my job to ensure the replacement went smoothly. The whole process took about two to three days, since it took a while for parts to reach us where we were. So, in the downtime, we did what everyone else did; played spades, exchanged stories about what idiot in the platoon did what in Tijuana, played two-hand touch since some douchebag got hurt and ran to sick call, planned out in detail which casino we would lose all our money at, and all the other things a person does while they're in exile from society. I found out very little about him, since he was a superior and didn't try to befriend any of us.

I did find out that he had two children and his wife was pregnant with his third. Everyday he would run over to the phone center and call his wife to see how she was feeling. Other than that, he didn't fraternize with us much more than a small joke here and there and a

"how-you-doin'-devil-dog" in the morning.

"Really…you're acting like a fucking child. Why won't you answer me? You know, it would make this man's year if you would just say hi to him."

After we finished his vehicle, he was rushed into a mission with his crew while I waited back at his base for an escort to take me back to my own. I ended up being stranded there for a week, but I didn't complain; the chow hall was better and there was a women's barracks across from mine. At night I could see them parading to the bathroom in their skimpy shorts, catch a glimpse of something I hadn't had since I got here. Two days in I found out that the base had a lounge, complete with five X-boxes and a library of games. The remainder of my time there was spent playing NBA 2k4 or Splinter Cell, hoping I wouldn't be called back to resume my work of filling sandbags for a fort or digging another bomb shelter or whatever the company staff had dreamed up to keep us busy and frustrated when no work came in. But, alas, all good things must come to an end, and I was escorted back to my own base at the end of the week.

I got back to my base and was met by my own staff sergeant. He informed me that a line hadn't been fully tightened on the vehicle I had just fixed. As a result, the vehicle had to be brought in from a mission to our base to "unfuck" what I had neglected to check. At that point, he told me it was taken care of by another mechanic and that the vehicle had just left minutes earlier.

Almost immediately after he finished the sentence, I heard an explosion in the background and thought little of it. Explosions had become all too familiar in the desert, like crickets at night. So I went back to my room and thought nothing of it.

"C'mon … it'll just be for a couple of minutes. He just wants to shake your hand…that's all. I don't understand why you're so nervous."

The next day a vehicle was brought in by one of our recovery tanks. I overheard that it had been blown up outside the gate the previous day. I looked closely at it and came to recognize it as the vehicle I

worked on the previous week. The bomb exploded and sent hundreds of ball bearings through the air. The driver survived the blast, getting evacuated via helicopter due to ball bearings being embedded in his ass. Other passengers also lived, some with very serious but non-fatal injuries. Only one person died, and it was just the person I thought it was. He died manning a weapon. His body was half-exposed and when the blast occurred, his head and chest were assaulted by those tiny ball bearings traveling at hundreds of miles per hour. The blast left his body unrecognizable, largely due to the fact that his head was blown into several pieces.

Mortuary Affairs came through and removed all of the body parts that were recognized as human. Afterwards, I was tasked with cleaning the vehicle of any remaining blood, so that it could be shipped off to some demo lot. Armed with a pressure washer and a dust mask, I entered the tank with trepidation.

As I started to clean the vehicle, I realized that about half of what I was blowing off with the jet stream was not coagulated blood, as I suspected, but the remaining brain matter that Mortuary Affairs couldn't make out in the pools of gelatinous blood. I gagged, enclosed with the smell of dried blood and rotting flesh in the hundred and forty degree weather. After a while I started to notice that the powerful jet stream was blowing with such force that the blood was actually spraying onto my uniform, staining it with the remnants of the person I failed.

"You're being childish. It wouldn't hurt you just to meet this poor old man. Grow the fuck up."

So as I sat in the car waiting for her to stop yelling, I thought about all of this and knew that there was no way I wanted to meet this man. How could I look in the face of man who though of me as some ideal? He thought of me as having made a sacrifice, whereas I thought of myself as having sacrificed someone else. I knew it would be too hard for me to accept a "thank you" from someone who had the wrong idea of what I had endured and what kind of person I felt I was.

"It will only be for a couple of minutes... I don't know why you're making

such a big deal out of this."

I remember stepping off the plane once I returned home the second time. My whole company was greeted by a group of volunteers taking time out of their day just to make us feel welcome back in the US; a luxury veterans of other wars did not have. As I walked into the hangar, a Vietnam veteran stopped me with tears in his eyes. He told me that he knew I must have seen horrible things, but that he prayed for my safe return and that he was proud of my service. He held out his trembling hand for a handshake, and I looked down and noticed that my hand was trembling too. I wasn't trembling because I felt I related to this man and his kind words and his vulnerability, but because I felt like I didn't deserve the attention and reverence. I just wanted to be alone. The last thing I wanted was someone inadvertently confronting me on all of the guilt that lay beneath the surface.

"I can't fucking believe you … you are so ungrateful. This poor man would pray for you and ask about you everyday. You're such a fucking asshole!"

I just sat there and tried not to make eye contact with her. I didn't want to let on that I didn't want to meet him due to my own personal anxiety. I tried to pass it off as if I didn't care about the man, but that just angered her. She never really could tell when I was depressed or happy; but in those days I was just severely depressed. Anyway, I thought of the first thing that came to mind.

"I really gotta take a shit…I'm never eating that much again."

She laughed hysterically and took me home. It was the end of the argument. I had defused the situation as I most often do whenever someone asks a penetrating question.

I managed to avoid meeting that man for the rest of my visit back home. I never had to stare into the eager eyes of a person who needed to believe that I was some valiant knight working to restore the world to some sense of order in the aftermath of recent events. Although I have grown since then and feel better talking about my time in the service, there are still times when I am struck with the nauseating guilt of the past. The hardest part about it is that no matter how much you tell yourself you are not to

blame and how much you reassimilate into society, in an instant you can be dropped to your knees and reminded of all the things you want to stop hating yourself for.

Tanya Boroff

Before Lent

Summer came on fast
that year-- one day
I was wearing thin
spring sneakers, soaked through
to my toes from walking
over New England
snow that kept falling inside
the 495 belt, that disappeared
all at once just before
Lent, forty days before
the last Easter season we had
to mourn the things we'd given
up to be good enough to keep you happy.
We left winter and suddenly
it was ninety degrees
at your house when you dropped
all the eggs we'd dyed on the front
lawn, hidden under the burning
bushes and behind the Weeping
Willows, leaving us
to look for them long after we stopped
waking up in the middle of the night, afraid to look
out the window at the southern
sky or even to ask for a glass of water. Some
we never found, and maybe they rotted as you
aged, inside the white house that burned
in my memory long after
that sudden summer turned to ash and time
wore a hole in the toe of my thin white
Keds and I gave up giving things
up for Lent even though I was afraid
if I didn't, winter would die soon and you
wouldn't stop praying for us

long enough to see us grieve
for the New England winter
you'd stolen away.

Christa Smith

Window to Ice

Gorette Sousa

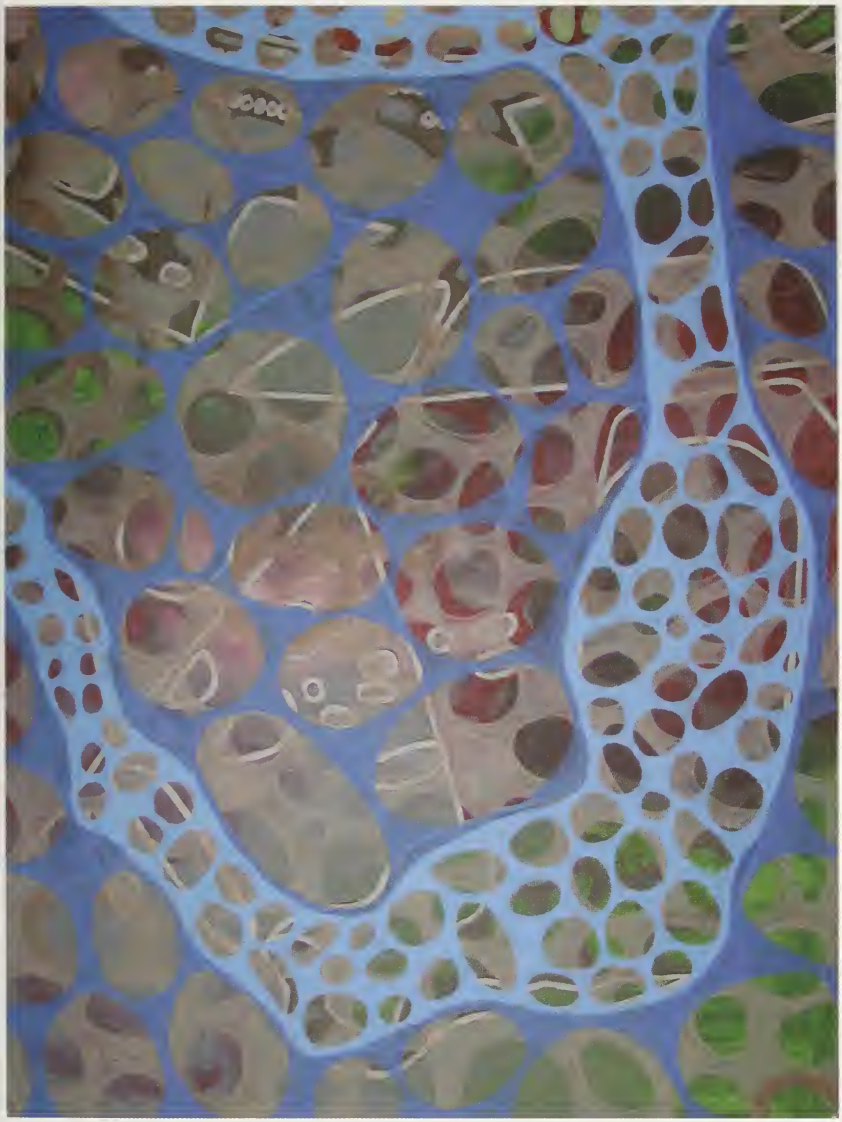
Reflection

Tranquility

Mike Leonard

A Dying Art

Corinne Fleming



Fenway

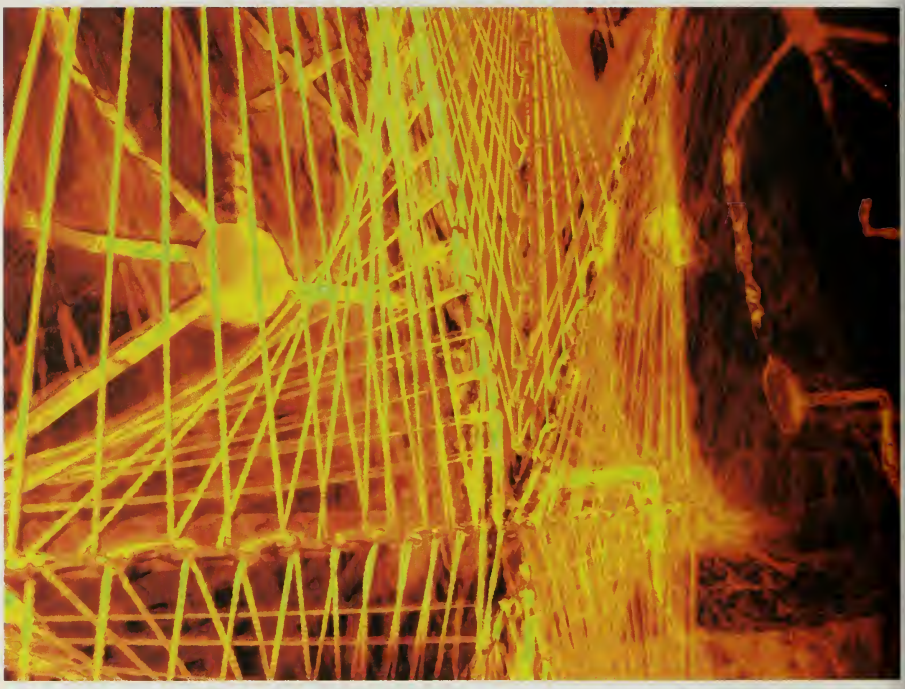
Erica Johnson

Pratolino

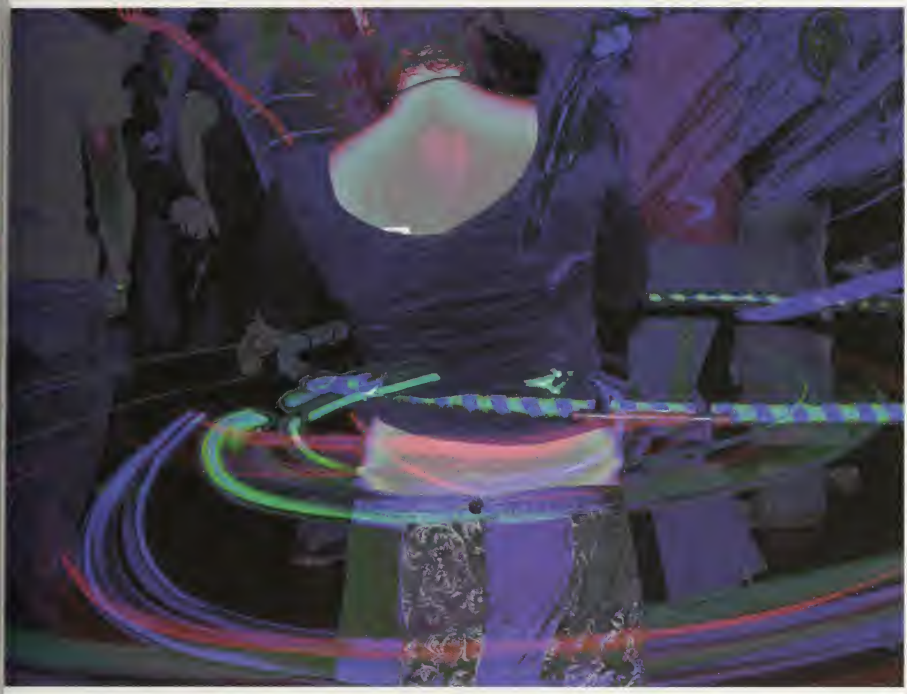
Paula Kolek

Self Portrait

Mike Shick



String Fire Theory



Backspin

Eric Didrikson

Blue Ghandi

Christa Smith

Angles

Meghan Chiampa

Forgiveness

The Great Barrier

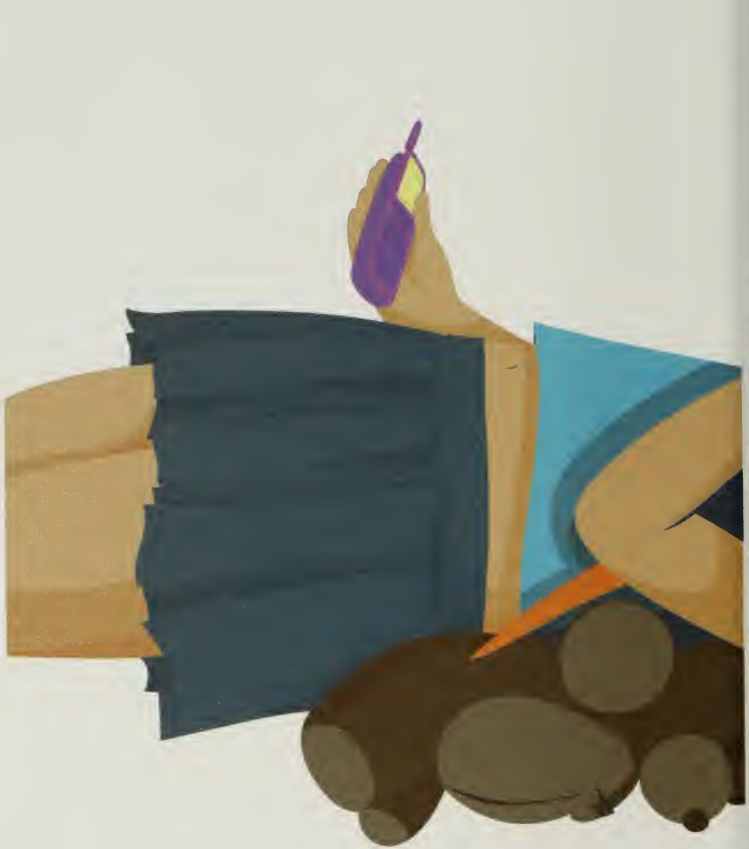
Priyanka Chawla

An Indian Villager

Rebecca Perry

Madness Without Enlightenment

Paul Sung



XXX

Carmela Caruso

My Father's Garden

From mid-May through the
summer months, my dad would stand
watch with rows of rocks
along the porch railing, scare
squirrels from his family's feast--

Cucumbers crawled through
chain links, craned around to face
the sun; their yellow-
green leaves climbed in layers like
slanted shingles on rooftops.

Cherry, plum, and beef
tomatoes flowered from stalks
that towered over
my father as he tied twine
around wooden pole and plant.

Beans blossomed behind
rows of carrots-- carefully
pocketed into
finger holes (after I had
searched the dirt for spiders, rocks.)

Onions cooled under-
ground, sent scallions shooting straight
up like preschool hands,
beside bell peppers, green, red,
and eggplants purple, pregnant.

Potatoes were slow
to grow, demanded kneeling

knees on fall-frosted
earth, frozen fingers, and nails--
clogged and broken crescent moons--

He'd crowd brown bags and
mom's plastic baking bowls with
ripe vegetables, make
mud marks on the kitchen floor
from the back door to the fridge.

Jeffrey Norquist

A Fair Looking Picture

The gunfire has been stopped for over a half hour. Across the large lawn and beyond a scatter of trees, the bleached buildings of the town wait indifferently in the glare. The heat swallows the sounds of a truck on the road, of two soldiers talking on the park's pathway, of a small flock of gray and black birds calling in the trees. The sun presses down on two women together in the park. That they are companions is not obvious. They are among a number of people, some laying still, others turning over again and again, trying to heat or cool or comfort some portion of their selves. One of the women, lying down as if she had collapsed or been thrown there, is at an angle to the other, who is sitting on the grass. They could be alone or paired with any of the nearby bodies reposing under the clear, hot sky, but for the fact that they were talking together.

"The clouds have gone, Missy," the sitting woman says. She gathers her hair into one hand and wraps a yellow cotton rag around it with the other. Her thick calves poke from the hem of a plain green dress wrapped with an apron, and, twitching in time left then right, her foot brushes at a rough woolen bag on the grass. "Can you hear me? Are you sleeping? Have you died?"

"I am not sleeping," Missy answers her apparent friend, her lips scarcely moving. She's wearing a light blue dress. She turns on her side, her arm folding beneath her head, her long, dark legs bent and pressing together. "I'm just trying to be comfortable. It's so hot. Hotter than I expected."

The woman in the plain green dress lifts her head slightly, and looks across the lawn, her eyes blinking against the bright sunshine. Her wide, burgundy nose scrunches, and glistens in the heat. She looks quickly at the two soldiers standing nearby, them she turns slowly to her companion, brushing bits of grass from her solid lap. "When my husband left for work this morning, it was already a very hot day."

"So?"

"Well, he wore his best clothes, and his best clothes are too warm for today. I asked him, 'Why are you dressed so nice? What important

people are you meeting?' and he said that he wanted to look his best at the shop today, because now that the rebellion is over, the Neighborhood Committee representatives would be returning to town and he wanted to make them feel welcome. Listen to this, Missy, my husband said, 'Aida, we will be part of the new Ethiopia.'"

"Neighborhood committees?" murmurs the other woman.

"That's what Mengistu's soldiers are called you know," she waved her hand at the two men in uniform, and several more in the distance. "To hear my husband talk, you'd think he himself beat the EPRP." She squeezes her soft lips together, thinking, and then draws a breath and continues. "A new man in charge doesn't mean a new Ethiopia. Whether rebels, or Mengistu's committees, or my cheating husband is in charge, they're all men, all the same telling lies."

"Your husband cheated?" Missy says. "What did you do? I know what I would do, if I had a husband who cheated."

"Yes?" Aida asks. "Tell me what you would do."

Missy speaks, drowsy, halting. "I would follow him. Discover his lies and make a scene. I would shame them both… somehow. Each husband cheats on his wife, until he knows she means business.."

"That's so? Well, I followed him." Aida says, shifting in the grass. "Can you guess where he went to?"

"No."

"He went to the shop." she says with flat irony. "I followed him. My husband, in his best, his jealous wife trailing him, was nodding his bald little head at the soldiers arriving by truck in the square, chatting with their commanders, somehow proud as a bird. Then, with several officers in tow, he goes to the shop! Imagine my husband, part of a new Ethiopia?!"

"He's a socialist?" Missy asks.

Aida looks thoughtfully at the grass. "My husband," she says, "is a coward. When the EPRP was here he put on the same best clothes and went out to meet their commanders. He always wears his best when he's going to see whores."

Missy turns onto her back and looks up at Aida. The yellow haze of the sun hovers on the edges of her ochre cheekbones, as if caught momentarily while drifting past. Her eyes narrow in their deep sockets. "Is this what we are here for?" she asks. "To talk about your coward husband?"

"Not exactly," Aida responds. "We are here because events move quickly, right? The reality of things is like taking a picture of the street, and it's a fair looking picture, but then the sun moves and the light changes, a man steps into the photo. Things that can't be predicted happen, and the scene changes. I thought my husband was going to his mistress, but he goes to the shop!" She stabs her fat knuckled finger at Missy. "You must realize that I felt very sure about my husband. I was surprised, but angry too."

"Why were you angry?" Missy asks flatly.

"Because I'm jealous! And a lack of proof he is cheating is simply proof undiscovered. So I wasn't angry at him for being faithful, but for being clever at his deceit."

"So, if it's jealousy, did you think he is faithful now?"

"I don't think that for a minute," says Aida. "But what could I do? Today he was giving money to the committees, but tomorrow, surely to a different whore. And I decided that tomorrow I will catch him." She looks at Missy lying in the sun. She slumps her shoulders. "So I went to the markets. What else could I do?"

Aida picks at some grass and twists it with her fingers. The taller of the soldiers watches her and drags on his cigarette, and then says something to the other. They laugh together, flashing mouthfuls of big white teeth. She looks back at them without expression.

"My husband," says Aida, still watching the men. "Is the sort who does well in a place like Ejersa Goro. We have always a new government, a new revolution, rebels, Mengistu, soldiers boot in, then out, the peasant armies slinking in their wake, the only constants are the men in charge, whether from the city or the bush, seeking out men like my husband, with his clean clothes and doting compliments, good alcohol and comfortable chairs in comfortable rooms."

Missy groans slightly and turns on her back. Her face pales and then flushes. She looks up at the blue sky. "I don't know what this has to do with me," she says. "Can't you just leave me alone?"

Aida pushes her arm. "Oh, you're funny," she says. "That's your charm isn't it? That you're funny? So, you are tall, light skinned, and pretty, and now funny too. But listen to the rest of the story. I've only told you about the morning when I followed my husband to the shop, and so much happened after that." She pushes Missy's arm again, looking down at her, smiling.

"I told you that I went to the markets," says Aida. "Many of the stalls were closed. People were nervous. More of Mengistu's soldiers were arriving all the time and gunfire could be heard. It wasn't fighting though. I never worry about soldiers myself; my husband pays a lot to protect us, no matter who's in charge. More than that Missy, I know a blunder by that stupid man could ruin me along with him, so I have saved money of my own. I can buy influence too."

She looks around serenely. Far across the park a small car pulls up to the gate, and honks its horn. The two men in uniform turn their heads at the sound and then start walking toward the car. As they are walking one of the soldiers, the shorter one with a curly, black beard patched to his cheeks, points at one of the people lying on the lawn, and seems to say something angry.

"At the market, I forgot about my jealousy. So you know I was surprised when I saw him, my husband, walking alone through the people, still looking for the world like some special bird. You see, Missy, I had given up too soon, but I took my second chance, I followed him and this time do you know where he went?"

"To his woman, right?"

"To a whore," Aida says emphatically. "I followed him to a small clapboard as far from our home as possible. The coward! Even from a distance I could tell he was at ease in this strange neighborhood. There was a group of children playing on the path, as he wove through them, he talked and laughed with them. Then he went to the door and didn't knock, Missy, he took out a key and he walked right in!"

Missy closes her eyes, wincing. "What did you do?" she asks.

"I couldn't think of what to do. Could I make a scene? Could I bang on the door and yell? Then, just a minute after he went inside, the children, giggling and shushing each other snuck up to the side of the house my husband had gone into. They began taking turns peeking in through the corner of a window. This was my chance. Scowling as if angry at them for spying, I approached the children, who saw me coming and ran off through the yards. I looked at the window; a curtain covered most of it except for one corner on the bottom. I bent down and looked inside. In the gloom I saw them, my husband and his tall, skinny worm, sitting on a bed. Her dress was already taken down to her waist; he was already kissing and touching her breasts. I watched and the whore lifted her hand and touched the back of his head. She

lifted her face and I saw her small smile, her serenity. She was happy. When my husband's hand moved between her thighs, a desperate joy, or some wild need flashed across her face. They lay back on the bed together and I turned away. I can't tell you about angry, or about how sad it is to watch another woman made happy by your husband." Aida turns to Missy, her face contorted. "How often I've been alone, waiting for him! I saw her face, and that need. I know it. I know that when he left her later, she just sat waiting for him again, wanting him again. I work for him, for his house and his children. I am the hostess when he has the commanders to the house, I am his pretense! His dupe! While she… in a house that he very likely bought for her, lazy all day, until she is asked to lay back and earn her keep! What hard work it is to be made happy!" She stops and breathes loudly through her nose, staring at the women on the ground beside her. Her hands clench and grasp at themselves.

"And this is why you are here? Why you harass me like this?" snaps Missy hoarsely, lifting herself slightly. "Because you are like every other married woman in Ejersa Goro, in Ethiopia, in every country across the world? You get the respect and the money and the day at the market. You get protection and children. You get and have so much! And those things aren't happiness?" A small stream of blood trickles out of her ear. She stops speaking and reaching up, scratches her ear, looking confused, and smears blood her cheek. She focuses on Aida again. "You believe sitting in a shack, being nobody's wife, the scandal of the neighborhood, an insect that even the children stare and point at, is happiness? You should think about your fat life before you worry about the scraps some people live on."

"Fat life? Oh, it was not me who lived a fat life, Missy! I was living a fool's life. I was the dupe. I returned to my home and waited. When my husband finally came home, I was waiting for him. I wanted to take his eyes out. Poison him. Make him desperate and alone feeling. I hate him, Missy, I do, I do. But he walked through the door, talking loud and happily. He had brought company home, two men in uniforms, clumps of medals on their jackets. He saw me, my husband, and smiled. Sweeping up to me, saying 'Ah', he wrapped an arm about my waist and introduced me to the officers. His 'lovely wife' he said. His 'radiant song' he said. They bowed their heads to me, and said they were 'honored'.

"My husband asked that I bring them cigars and then he and the officers went into the parlor. You see now that what I have is not what his whore has? She gets affection and wandering hands. What pretty things does he give her? I get fakery. I get to make corrupt men, killers, feel honored. But I do get some things; it's true, you are right. Where his whore is a worm, an insect, I am at least shown respect. I am offered the best products at the shops; I have money, and, most importantly, the privilege of playing hostess to the officers, the lead representatives of the newly returned Neighborhood Committee. These men are very serious about these ideas they've embraced. I listened to them discuss the war, the insurgents, the enemies of the revolution, of Mengistu's vision for Ethiopia. Do you know what the privilege of being part of the new Ethiopia costs?"

Aida pauses as if she is waiting for Missy to answer, but the woman stays quiet, and still, her breath becoming jagged and short.

"The cost is participation, Missy. Of being willing to say: 'I know a person who wants the revolution to fail. I know someone who is against Mengistu.' So I joined Missy, and offered those officers the name of a certain woman I know of, a mistress to the EPRP commander I told them, who might harbor sympathies against Mengistu's revolution. I get the privilege of my revenge, Missy. I told them your name; I told them where you live. And I watched my husband's face as I did. He barely flinched, but he did flinch. Not in a way most could see, but I could, and maybe you could have too. He was afraid, what would you tell them when they came and dragged you from your home? Was he making calculations about what he gave you and could now expect back from you? Missy, you whore, you worm, you insect! That is why you are lying here with all these criminals and traitors, shot in the stomach and left to die, and why he will never cheat on me again. Now he knows what I'll do!" Aida jabs at Missy and slaps her face. Missy waves her blood-streaked hand once in response, but then makes no effort to protect herself.

"Don't die on me yet, Missy," says Aida, rocking the woman's head. "I paid those soldiers at the gate good money to let me watch you suffer. I want more."

Missy's eyes fluttered open then closed. "You are rotten," she

whispers. "A stinking witch. That's what he called you, 'The Stinking Witch'"

Suddenly energized and grunting, Aida rolls onto her knees and opens the woolen bag beside her. She takes out a long brass knife and, choking out a small growl, plunges it into the dying woman's side. Missy's side twitches slightly, her lips open and her breath escapes. Aida stands up and looks down at her.

"It's a hotter day than you thought, eh?" She spits on her, turns to leave, but instantly stops. The two soldiers have returned from the gate dragging a battered, bloody man.

Aida clutches at her bag, looking around, desperation and wildness flash across her face. "What is this? What have you done to him?"

The soldiers drop the man on the path. "You know this man?" asks the taller soldier calls to her.

"He's my husband," Aida says.

The two soldiers step onto the grass towards her, the tall soldier works his cigarettes from his shirt pocket. "That is your husband, missy?"

Aida glances at her husband on the ground; his eyes are battered shut, blood streams from his mouth and ears, and from a deep tear in his cheek. He is stripped to his undershirt and pants; one of his shoes is missing. "I'm no missy," she says, lifting her face to the men and squaring her shoulders. "You want a whore?" She gestures at her husband and her apparent companion. "These are your whores."

"Yes, missy, these are whores," says the taller soldier, lighting his cigarette. He points at the woman dead at Aida's feet. "And that whore told us about this whore's complicity with the rebels." He kicks her husband in the side. He turns back to her and then draws closer. "And wives, missy, are guilty of their husband's crimes."

Aida stares back at him. She senses movement to her left, and then the bearded soldier's fist drives into her ear. She falls slumping to the ground, quietly, and the same soldier pulls his revolver and shoots her in the stomach. They walk away as Aida churns for relief on the ground. A low growl seeps past her dust caked lips. A long minute passes. She looks up through the branches above her as the birds that had wheeled into the air reflexively at the gunshot settled back into the

tree. She sputters, laughing. She cranes her head towards her husband's mistress.

"Look up there, Missy," she says to the corpse, weakly lifting her hand toward the trees. "Do you see those birds in the tree? They're going to eat you!"

Meghan Chiampa

Kurt Vonnegut's Heaven

I finally got to meet Kurt Vonnegut after I had died.
An angel had pointed him out to me, shaking his head,
"I don't know how he got in here."
Mr. Vonnegut was sitting at a cloudbar, drinking scotch. I ordered
a V8 and began talking about my age. On Earth
I had only lived to the age of twenty-five.
In Heaven I chose to be eternally seventeen.
"It was tough picking my age," I explained.
"I don't know what it is like to be thirty
or forty-three." Kurt laughed into his snifter,
"You aren't missing much, I was dead at eighty-four
and I picked twenty. How old are you? You look fourteen."
"Seventeen," I giggled. I didn't have to wear a bra
anymore, so my breasts jiggled in place like dishes of cold custard.
Kurt winked at me, "Seventeen. My Dad's only
eight. He sells lemonade to the angels. They pay him
in cloud dust." I nodded. "It would've been nice be
a child forever."
"Yeah," Kurt snuffed. "But, then you couldn't fuck!"
I looked around the sky for God or an eavesdropping Saint.
I was afraid the word 'fuck' was not allowed in Heaven.
Kurt caught me, "You can say anything here. It's not
Heaven without the pleasure of swearing." Kurt grinned,
and held out his drink to me. "No, no," I declined.
"That's how I got here to begin with." Kurt looked
puzzled, "Cirrhosis?" I hung my head, "Suicide.
A pint of whisky and seventeen sleeping pills."
Kurt finished his drink by tipping his head. He pulled his
body close to mine and said, "I committed suicide too.
It took me sixty-six years to complete the job. I did it by smoking
Pall Malls."
"Shouldn't we be in Hell?" I asked. "Suicide is a Sin."
"That's what I thought too," he whispered. "Stuck in the flaky

trees.
Getting eaten by harpies and so on." Paranoid,
we looked above us at the endless expanses of pearly
white clouds. The sky arched over our heads; a
burning blue like the top layer of tropical seawater.
We were adorned with glowing nimbuses and
periwinkle robes tied with golden ropes and glittering tassels.
Our eyes met, as if simultaneously realizing the same fear.
We lifted up the bottoms of our robes like curious children.
Mine was still between my legs, though unshaven.
I sighed with relief. Paradise before the apple would certainly be
hell.
I looked to Kurt and asked if his body was intact.
He glanced at me with trembling eyebrows
and said, "Can I see yours? I want to make sure mine still
works."

Paul Sung

Mouse

Paula Kolek

Above the River

Paul Celan

Deathfugue

Translated from the German by Jessica Johnston

Black Milk of Morning we drink it at dusk
we drink it at noon and at daybreak we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we dig a Grave in the Air where one will not lie cramped
A Mann lives in the Haus he plays with Snakes he
writes
he writes when darkness falls to Germany your golden
Hair Margareta
he writes it and walks out of his Haus and the stars flash
he whistles his Dogs near
he whistles his Jews in a row dig a Grave in the Ground
he commands us to play music for the Dance

Black Milk of Morning we drink you at night
we drink you at daybreak and at noon we drink you at dusk
we drink and we drink
A Mann lives in the Haus he plays with Snakes he
writes
he writes when darkness falls to Germany your golden
Hair Margareta
Your ashen Hair Shulamith we dig a Grave in the
Air where one will not lie cramped
He calls out stab deeper in the Ground you over there you others
sing
and play
he clutches for the Iron in his Belt he flaunts it his Eyes
are blue
stab the Spades deeper you over there you others play on for the
Dance

Black Milk of Morning we drink you at night
we drink you at noon and at daybreak we drink you at dusk
we drink and we drink
A Mann lives in the Haus your golden Hair Margareta
your ashen Hair Shulamith he plays with Snakes

He shouts play Death's song more sweetly this Death is a master
from
  Germany
he shouts now scrape your stings more darkly then you'll rise as
Smoke
  into the Air
Then you will have a Grave in the Clouds where one will not lie
cramped

Black Milk of Mourning we drink you at night
we drink you at noon Death is a mater from Germany
we drink you at dusk and at daybreak we drink and we drink
this Death is the Master from Germany his eye is blue
he shoots a lead Bullet he aims and hits his target is you
a Mann lives in the Haus your golden Hair Margareta
he sics his Dogs on us he gives us a Grave in the Air
he plays with Snakes and daydreams this Death is a Master
  from Germany

your golden Hair Margareta
your ashen Hair Shulamith

Translator's Note: One of Paul Celan's most anthologized and translated poems, Todesfugue has never been translated into English with the retention of the Germanic version's capitalization. While I have retained Celan's intentional capitalization and some of the Germanic words to acknowledge the potency of a holocaust poem written in German, my version clearly admires and acknowledges the previous translations by Michael Hamburger (1995), John Felstiner (2000), and Jerome Rothenberg (2005).

Dianne M. Kirkpatrick

Twisted

Jiang Jiang

Nancy's Boy

Meghan Chiampa

Blue Sonnet II

The pummeling rain sounds like a bucket of glass marbles
spilling all over a hardwood floor.

Waterbullets drown my consciousness and I garble:
I am desperately, desperately in love with you.
Thoughts of you eat away at my stomach like
bacteria scraping with razor sharp cilia.

I remind myself that a pursuit is incredibly stupid. (Like hunting
a snark.) Me and you will be dead in eighty years! Who cares?
Life is so embarassing. Folks pretend that they'll never die.
Our roles are old, old like the crumbly dirt stuck in the grids of
my sneaker soles.
Why don't we have fifty children who will (no doubt) live the
same trip; tumbling over themselves and loving everything.
Slick passion will envelope their souls and our love will be
immortal.
Is that the point? Am I close? Tell me. Tell me!

Paul Sung

Desirable

Deanne Ziadie-Nemitz

What's Beautiful?

I chose to write about myself. However personal, I am willing to strip myself down for you to understand the complexities of issues of beauty for women of color.

You don't know me, you may have impressions of me, you may say, "Damn, you are low", or "How disgraceful." Or you may just look at yourself in the mirror or at the next woman or man you find attractive passing you by on Newbury Street and ask yourself, "Why have we chosen to conform?" Maybe the solution is to have sympathy for yourself or that woman or man instead of feeling sexually stimulated by the force of physical attraction, or self battle for not being able to get that "damn" strand of hair straight. Maybe even my story may help you stop and question who implanted those seeds of self-hatred.

My name is Deanne. I am a 25 year old, wife, nurse, sister, daughter, cousin, friend, student at UMass Boston. Maybe all I have in common with you is the fact that I go to UMass Boston or maybe you may be one of the many at UMass Boston who had to check "Asian" under the racial categorization hoping to possibly get accepted to the school through affirmative action state laws.

I was born in Miami, Florida to a wonderful large family who claim to be Americans. Possibly the most patriotic team of Republican Catholics I know. Growing up, I felt "Yes I'm proud to be an American, where at least I know I'm free!." The popular song, "God Bless the USA," by country singer Lee Greenwood, plays repeat in my head, building a flow of tears in the corner of my 'almond-shaped' eyes. However, though I believe I am American, many oppose me. When I'm asked the question, "What are you?" the puzzlement begins.

"I'm American?"

"No, where are you from?"

"America"

"No, where are your parents from?"

"Jamaica."
"What? You don't look Jamaican!"
"What do you know about Jamaicans?
"Jamaican's are black and have dreadlocks?"
I tell my parents, they answer, "Deanne you are American, you were born here!" Students and random people on the street stop me and ask me. "American? No, before that?"

What is before American? I wonder, this frustrates me. Ah..I get it, it must be white. Maybe if I'm white, people won't ask me that question. White people don't get those questions and if they do they just say, "I'm White" and that is it.

I see so many girls and guys around me dying their hair lighter, putting blue contacts in their eyes. I want to dye my hair. I sit close to the television hoping I can get bad eyes so mom and dad can't object to me choosing colored contact lenses. My first cousin, who is like my older sister, has blue eyes. Besides that, we look a lot a like. Her mom allowed her to highlight her hair blond.

We are always compared, and she always wins, "Most Beautiful!" Me? Oh…I won, "nice smile", you see, she needs braces. I want that attention, I want to be beautiful! I want people to envy me too! People don't question her when she says she's American. If they do, she says she likes it, cause especially guys think she's "exotic," different, beautiful. I'm sick of not existing, or existing as the "other." Not American, pretty smile.

So I moved out at the age of 23. I got my own job as a nurse so mom and dad could be proud and brag about the achievements their little girl has made and "thank god for that scholarship for minorities!" Otherwise I may not have had a chance to succeed.

I got married, not to anyone but a "white" guy, "Wow! Bravo Deanne, you may succeed in having beautiful children. How cute, a little white baby with Asian eyes and your curly light brown hair. You are so lucky," my friends say.

I'm drawn into this hysteria of wanting to be white, but still "ethnic" at the same time. What the hell does that mean?

I begin to feel feverish. I notice my husband attracted to "white" women, or "ethnic" women who exaggerate the media's perceptions of beauty. "Big, bigger breasts!"
I look down at my own chest... "Well, I can always get surgery?"

My friend who is from Venezuela, "Half Black, and half Italian" got breast implants; she told me I would do good to have some. I asked her about her experience. She told me she almost died under general anesthesia, the first time. She had to reschedule her surgery date, and she did, and she got her new jewels and she loves the attention she gets. "I did this for me, I don't care what girls say, I did not do this for a man, my husband asked me not to do it, but he sure doesn't mind playing with them."

I see my husband looking at her plastic water-balloons. I tell him they are fake, he says, "Oh..why would anyone do that? I don't understand." But then I see his head turn towards the bigger boobs that pass us by on Newbury Street. I can't blame him, I soon learned like I am-trapped in this system of commodifying people to a standardization of "white" Western physical beauty.

He turns his head, I envy, she envies, we all want to be white! Because that is what is around us. White succeeds, white is rich, white gets the girls/guys, whiter is more attractive...(or is that tanned?) All of the most popular people are light skinned, look at American celebrities. If you don't agree then look around you, maybe on Newbury Street, maybe in your neighborhood beauty parlors posters, maybe on TV, maybe in Playboy magazine, or internet porn sites. We all want to be attractive. Attraction is sexy, sexy is beauty. What is sexy, beautiful? Whiter, or some exotified nude "ethnic" or colored woman with her legs open or cleavage showing.

I ask my friend who lives in Jamaica about beauty. He is poor, he lives in a shack pulled together by scraps of wood and metal, he is studying the teachings of Rastafari. He considers himself black. I tell him I cut my hair. He asks why, I say, "I wanted to get rid of the dye." He says, "I don't understand why all the girls gone and dye up their hair like that, you see it's dem chemicals dat go in a they head and poison their minds telling them this is what is prettier, beautiful. When I look at nature I look around me, everyone say when dey gone search for

beauty they go in a de nature, so I tink isn't dat what's beautiful, isn't true beauty what is how you are when you come out of your mother, natural, dat's beautiful." I smile at his simple yet powerful words.

I look at myself in the mirror, I peel away all of that blonding dye, eye make-up that enlarges my eyes, pastel colors that jump off my skin, I look at my small breast, small butt, short legs, long arms, large nose, small eyes, curly frizzy hair...I look and I smile...because I have found the secret to true sexy, true beauty, n

Madlyen Suprun

Contemporary Art

Jason Bedore

Anything To Notice Nothing

When I told my father that I was going to propose to Mary, he didn't say anything at first. He looked at his shoes. He picked at his thumb-nail and turned to the microwave. He stared and watched the digital timer count down to zero from eleven. When the microwave finished beeping he said, "Jimmy, every animal is sad after intercourse." He turned around and looked at me as if to say, by quoting Aristotle, he had just given me his blessing. I took a seat at the kitchen table. He dunked the tea bag in a mug that I gave my mother years earlier, 'Mothers make the world smile.' Wrapping the tea bag around a spoon he squeezed it with his thumb and continued, "Jimmy, people orchestrate their lives according to certain plans, rigid plans, sometimes. After we fall in love, and especially, after we have some sort of sexual relationship, life gets funny. Funny for everyone. You know what that's like. After said relationship exists, everything that follows is just a poor attempt to fill some sort of empty space. Something that we can't fill because it's gone as soon as it's over. But, people still have their plans, right? Finish school, find that job your father's been harping on you to find, find a pretty girl—not any girl—a pretty one, one that will give your mom and dad pretty grandkids, no one likes ugly babies. Anyway," he sipped his tea, "then we get sad."

I thought about this, I really did, and before my father died, I'd wanted to do all the things he just listed off: I finished school; I got the job; I found a girl, a pretty girl; now I was following through with the girl and I didn't quite understand what my father was getting at.

"Point is, Jimmy," he said. "When you propose, don't just give her a ring. Mary will expect a ring. Shit, give her anything but an ordinary ring." He sat down at table. He looked out the window, through the blinds, and he started laughing.

"What?"

"For Christ sakes, if I had it to do all over again, I'd have given your mother an empty box."

"No you wouldn't have," I laughed.

"No, I would have, and I'd have told her to never open it."

"What would that serve?" It was an interesting idea, but I didn't get it. "What good, not to mention Mom's disappointment, would it have served to give your fiancé an empty box?"

"I don't know, to spite Aristotle. Really, I guess it would have just been something, some nothing. You could fill it, in a way, with all sorts of images, memories, I guess," he sipped from the mug. It dribbled down his beard. "You know, by association it would be sort-of a constant reminder. I don't know."

"No, I guess, I understand," I moved into the table. "With all the emptiness that might be carried over, through whatever, there's something. Something that remains unopened. And, in that way, it's filled. Without knowing, without opening it, it really is filled. Sort-of."

"Right," My father noticed his beard dripping on the table. He reached for a napkin, "Sad after intercourse? Put it in the box. You know, kind of like they used to say to us as kids, in church, 'Got a problem, Son? Offer it up to god.'" He laughed hard. "I don't know. It'd be fun to watch. And you'd keep it around. Hang on to it. So you could remember the reason you gave it to her in the first place. The reason you're married."

"Like a trust thing?" I asked.

"No, not so much that, more like a wedding or an engagement ring. But it'd prove to be more lasting, more original, less showy, all those things. In a way, even something more sincere. Sentimental, sure, but too original to be sappy. It'd be tough, though."

"What would?" I asked.

"Not opening the sucker," he laughed again. He looked back out the window.

"What are you looking at?"

"You're mother. She's picking some basil." He said this without looking back at me.

"Alright, look, I'm off. Mary's supposed—"

"Mary," my father cut me off.

"Mary what?" I asked. "What about Mary?"

"Nothing, except…" He was still watching my mother.

"Nothing except, what?" I played with my keys, the key ring on my finger. "She'd open it," he finished, without turning to me. Then he brought the mug to his lips. Sipped, swallowed, turned with what looked liked sun-butter on his cheeks and asked, "Son, do we

have any more of those butter cookies left? The kind in the blue tin?"

I handed her the empty box. "Here you are," I started. It was a modest size box; shoebox size, but more square. I wrapped it in navy-blue and gold paper. Then I asked her to marry me. It was her birthday. She said, of course, Yes. I sat down next to my fiancé on the couch. I kept thinking, she's a year older, and she said, yes: Mary Hennessey, fiancé, 29 years old. I thought it sounded funny, "Happy birthday, Mary," and it slipped out, "my fiancé."

"Thank you," she kissed me. She held the box and leaned into me, "Now, what's this?" She was slim and professional looking. We had just returned from dinner. She was dressed in a power-suit. She wore them to work. They looked savvy, sharp, starched. The pursuit of the power-suited, I thought.

Her hair was cut short and it bent up and under her chin. It cuffed and contained her face. A face as round as hers needed framing, so she employed her blonde, curving hair-do to do so. It cost thirty-five dollars and a ten dollar tip at a salon. A forty-five dollar face-frame. Her face never rolled away.

"It's nothing," I took the box out of her hands. I placed it on the coffee table, "So, I don't want you to open it."

She didn't say anything for a few minutes. She gave me a look that made me want to dig my hands into clay, create and shape faces that I could mount, like busts, in the living room. Muscles around her eyes asked questions. Her small forehead pleaded for some sort of explanation. She'd never used that face before. Her mouth opened to nothing. That was the first thing that found its way into the box.

"Jimmy," Her eyes were strobe lights. They flashed from one side of my face to the other. Her eyes were something definitely her own. The color green was nothing outrageous. Their shape was pretty ordinary. But they moved a lot. Like they'd been drawn by some violent animator in Disneyworld, her eyes had a bizarre way of suggesting things severely and comically. And that round face of hers, well, her face would've rejected another pair of eyes. By what I suspected was the animator's design, her eyes seemed to be the proprietors of her face. They collected the emotional rent I paid to be held in them. And I know that sounds very much like we shared a strict businesslike relationship, but that's not really how we were. Nonetheless, I figured

those flickering eyes really belonged in the box. You know, in an associative sort-of way. "Jimmy, hunny," she laughed. It was a breaking laugh. Waves broke like she laughed. Her laugh lost strength and fell out of her mouth and into the box, I thought. "Why would you give me something on my birthday that I couldn't open?"

"Well, I didn't say you couldn't open it. I asked you not to." At least that's what I meant. "Anyway, you're my fiancé now, don't you have to do as I tell you?" I smiled

"Ha, like hell I do." Bold defiance from the power-suited. She reached out for the box. By joking, I had totally misled her.

I shouldn't have been kidding around.

"No, no really," I had grabbed the box before she could. "Just trust me, okay?"

She fell back where she sat. She sort of bounced in the dark blue sofa. She crossed her arms. She crossed her legs. I put my hand down on her thigh and said, "Listen, it's nothing. I mean it." I stood up to move into the kitchen to get a bottle of champagne, she hadn't moved. But as I stood, her eyes traveled up to mine. She wasn't pouting, but her eyes were.

"Where are you going now?" She wasn't mad, but maybe she was pretending to be. It was hard to tell.

"I've got some champagne." She liked champagne. "You'll have some, won't you?" I turned and started into the kitchen without her answer.

"Only if I get to open my present," she yelled out to me.

She'd have champagne. She'd wait to open the present. Mary was more intelligent than I was. She had more patience, too.

In the kitchen, I went to the refrigerator. We'd lived in this house two years. 25 Alden Rd. Down the street from the Dairy Barn. Mary loved mint chocolate chip ice cream.

I met Mary in college. She and I were in a marketing class together at Brandeis. She was majoring in business, so was I. I sat behind her. One day I sneezed and didn't really cover my mouth or anything. It was sort of gross. She'd said it was the most disgusting thing to happen to her since a bird shit on her head in the third grade, at recess. She told me she cried and went home from school. She laughed, "The sensation of bird shit behind your ears," she claimed, "is something you'll never be young enough to appreciate again. When it happens, it's sad

because you're too young to be anything but humiliated." I remember she smiled and finished, "When you're older and you understand that there is no such thing as a premeditated act of bird-shitting, so to speak, you sort of wonder if you'll ever feel something like free falling, warm, cottage cheese smack the back of your head again. And strangely, you conclude that you were something terrifically special on the day all the daffodils, you and your classmates ordered, were delivered to school for you to take home in the third grade."

Anyway, that's how I met her. The next day, in our marketing class, she said I was too peculiar for business. I said peculiar business was all I knew. My first order of peculiar business was to get her to let me buy her dinner. She didn't mind.

I grabbed the bottle out of the refrigerator and opened it on the counter. I tried not to spill much of it. I wasn't paying attention. I got a few champagne glasses, we bought them when we moved in. I set them on the counter and noticed half the bottle dripping onto the floor. A foamy mess.

Mary yelled from the other room, "Jimmy, I just don't understand. Why are you making me wait to open this thing? When, Jimmy." Her voice trailed off.

After our first date she said she'd think about seeing me again. I saw her in class the next day and, whether she thought about seeing me or not, I was seen. We both decided the marketing class was more enjoyable after I sneezed on her.

We took more classes together, made "seeing one another" a bit of a habit. We both ended up applying to the same grad schools. I wanted to work with mutual funds and she figured she'd help people with IRAs.

College finished, we were dating seriously then. No one else had sneezed on her, not that I could tell, so we had stayed together. We stuck around Brandeis for grad school. When that was over we both got jobs at Fidelity, in Boston.

I looked in the living room. Mary had the box over her head. I held the glasses of champagne and stared. She brought the box down to her ear. She shook it. Her blonde frame of hair shook. She knew something was inside. She knew like every kid that wore a paper birthday hat, and sat opening gifts, that the last present given to them was supposed to be the best one. It usually came from their parents. This one,

Mary knew, was important. I could tell by watching her. She wanted to discover what kept me from letting her open it. On your birthday you could always have your cake, and if you wanted, eat it, too. At the wedding, this cliché would come back to me as I thought I heard the priest say, "Speak now, or forever hold your piece of cake." Which, in turn, made me think of the empty box while I kissed her.

I brought the champagne in to her. She looked at me and put the box down on the coffee table. I gave her the glass. She had long fingers and she held the glass out in front of her, in her right hand. She didn't paint her nails. But they looked glossy, I knew she put something on them to keep them healthy. The image made me think of how she must have felt then, not having a ring to put on her left hand. What would she show her friends at work? I entertained the idea for a moment, just a minute. Then I thought of what she'd tell them.

"Thank you," she said. She didn't look at the box now, she just met my eyes. This time there was little movement to them, just concentration. Grave, serious focus.

"You know, we've got a few things to toast to," I told her. And I winked, I looked at the box, too. She knew I was peculiar, into peculiar business. She hadn't said no, when I asked her to marry me. "Like Chekhov's death. Although, they didn't really toast to that."

"Jimmy," she started. The look asked for the emotional rent money. I paid this too often, I thought.

"But it's his 96th anniversary." My father reminded her yearly that Chekhov passed away on her birthday. He loved this idea, thinking that I was some how romantically attached to the reincarnated author. Life escaping death, or something like that. Then he'd tug at his beard and start mumbling, musing over a paradox he struggled with yearly and would eventually forget about.

"And he didn't believe in an afterlife. So what?"

"Okay, alright," I resigned. "Happy birthday, Mary. To our future?"

"To our future together, James."

She smiled, she met my glass and kept her eyes on me for a second before she tasted the champagne.

She put the glass down on the table. She rested her elbows on her knees; cupped her face in her hands. Her cheeks could cushion church pews. She was looking right at the box. Without looking at me she spoke "Whatever's in that box, it'd better not be a ring. If it's a ring, I

want it now."

Months later, Mary and I were packing for Bali. Mary wanted to honeymoon there. I looked into it and we stayed away for a week. Our last night there, after we made love, she got out of the bed and went to the closet. She brought out the bag she had carried with her on the plane. She had an agenda.

"What are you doing with that?" I asked her, as she came traipsing back to the bed, naked, with the carry-on bag in her hand.

"Jimmy." She looked at the bag, she held it in two hands in front of her belly. The bed in the hotel room was adjacent to two draped, French-paneled doors that led out onto a veranda. It was a warm night and the doors were open quite a bit. The moon had a generous view of Mary. The drapes moved like sheets dried on a clothesline in Alabama. I remembered Mary's brother. That's where I'd seen sheets dry like that. At her brother's house, the week before the wedding.

"Jimmy, I thought maybe," she looked up from the bag. If anyone noticed her standing there, they'd want her to pose in advertisements for Bali-Air. "I thought, now that we were married, and we're in Bali, I could open the present you gave me. When you asked me to marry you." She didn't want to stop to wait for an answer, to breathe, to think, "Please, Jimmy?" She fell forward onto the bed with the bag.

Inside the bag, the box.

I laughed.

"Jimmy," she hit me, "this isn't funny. Seriously, I want to know. What's in this damn thing? What is it?"

"Mary." Had I really spoken? I pulled her over to me, across my body. "I'm sorry, come here. Give that to me." I took the bag and the box out of her reach. Maybe I was underestimating her, I don't know. But I wasn't going to let her open it yet.

I held her for a minute. What was this really about?

I pushed Mary up. I sat up, pulled her out of bed with me. I brought her to the mirror which was on the opposite wall. I told her to look at the mirror. You could see the drapes behind us. You could see the moon and the little bit of the beach and the ocean that was visible from where we were standing. You could hear what sounded like her laughter.

I wanted her to see me put something in the box. I wanted her to see

how I did it. Make her notice. My reflection held her there for a long time. She didn't know what I was up to. It got pretty dark for a minute. The moon disappeared behind what I imagined as a single black sheep in the sky, an accidental rift in a child's dream as he fell asleep counting sheep. From the child's head into and across the sky. Nursery rhymes found their way into my head. I began humming "Baa-Baa Black Sheep." When the moonlight crept back in through the veranda doors, it could have shattered the mirror. We could have fallen apart with it. In the mirror, the bed and the box. I stood behind Mary. My shoulders were sun burnt. My hair was matted, cut short. It was damp and sweaty. My chin, by her ear, was losing its definition. My face was less narrow. My thin lips parting and whispering the rhyme. My own dark eyes looked to her strange cartoon ones. I watched her follow my hands as they slowly moved down her shoulders, to her elbows, to her hands. I held them, crossed her body. She didn't blink as my mouth told her to shut her eyes and imagine everything as it was.

Mary didn't get it. She didn't get it until my father died. Then it was too late for me to know what to do. That's a way of saying it, I guess. When Mary didn't get it, when Dad died of a heart attack, when she opened the box and found nothing, I saw nothing.

"What the hell are you doing?" This was all very wrong, I thought. Nothing right about the situation at all. Mary was sitting on the couch. She had her black suit jacket—oh, and she thought she was so damned power-suited—thrown over the couch, real casual, real comfortable looking with a big spoon in her hand, fist deep in a gallon of mint chocolate chip. She had maybe five minutes more time, was in the house just moments longer, and our box was busted right open, on the coffee table. Right like it was a very open-casket-like event. As if one funeral hadn't been enough.

"Mary," I moved over to the table. I touched the blue and gold paper with my finger tips. "Mary, why'd you open it. What on earth made," I stopped. "No, forget it, you weren't getting it anyway. It doesn't mean a damn thing. It never meant a damn thing to you."

"James," she actually looked up for a moment. "What did it mean to you?"

"No, and you weren't going to—what?" I took my jacket off, I laughed. "What does," I laughed twice as hard, "What did it mean to

me. Ah, hell, what's it matter now." I dropped my jacket on the couch and towards the kitchen.

The silence and the mumbling of my father. The darkness and the singular, individual streams of sunlight that snuck in through the Venetian blinds in the kitchen convinced me that death caught up and smothered any life that ever tried to outrun it. Christ, I thought, everything was inevitable, everything in life and death and in my father's voice. There had never been an answer to his annual paradox. Chekhov was dead. Together they were as dead, more dead, than all their unanswered, unsolved questions of the world. I rocked on the threshold of the kitchen doorway. And Dad never mentioned how, or why, or what to do if, no, when Mary opened the box.

I considered the intense insensitivity of pulling a stunt like this on the very day of my father's funeral. What was she at? Was she really that bitter about a ring? A ring? In all my life, I never could have imagined a ring—

And then she was behind me. A sensation so haunting I saw the light ahead of me in the kitchen, on the floor, shudder and intensify and appear darker by contrast. Nothing, I thought. I thought of nothing and knew her behind me. She put her hands on my waist.

"James," she just whispered. If there are one million sneezes that are expelled yearly, weekly, daily, I don't know, by a human being, if one of those sneezes, its speed could be slowed down and felt as passionately as I could hear her voice, the breath I sensed passing my ear, whispers would become utterly transient. Whispers would disappear for this kind of speech.

"James, there was nothing in there." She could feel me shaking and she reached her arms up and under mine, pushed on my shoulders, pushed me into her. I knew it wasn't the ring she was about. Everything was forgiven already. I didn't understand the situation anyway.

"James," She put her long dry fingers to my face. "James, it wasn't about keeping it unopened." Like I'd been sweating, she brought her hands to my cheeks and cooled them.

"Nothing is something too much to keep in any little box like that, James."

I guess I shook my head, I can't remember. But she took her arm from under mine, against me. Took her hand from my face and held my head still. She put her hand in my hair. "Wasn't this what you

wanted me to have, Jimmy? Huh?"

At once, I saw everything on the kitchen floor. The hardwood and the lines where each individual bit of paneling met the other. I knew a pattern. The sunlight was a hard fixture and a soft glaze on the floor. Dust, I saw the dust. I saw little dots in the light coming together with other dots like magnetic filings. I didn't see her hands when I knew only darkness and remembered everything, for a moment, as it was.

Dimitri Tripodakis

Awards

The awards for each issue are independently judged by a guest writer or artist. Each prize comes with a monetary award of $100.

Martha Collins Poetry Award

The Martha Collins Poetry Award honors the best work of poetry published in each issue of the Watermark. Ms. Collins established the creative writing program at the University of Massachusetts Boston, and currenly holds the Pauline Delaney Chair in Creative Writing at Oberlin College. Her honors include fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, and three Pushcart prizes. Collins is the author of a book-length poem, *Blue Front,* as well as four other books of poetry. She has also published a chapbook, co-translated two collections of Vietnamese poems, and edited a volume of essays on Louise Bogan.

This semester, the Martha Collins Poetry Award goes to Nathan Gamache for his poem, "First Warm Winter". Janaka Stucky acted as guest judge.

Janaka is a poet, an editor, and an undertaker. He received his BA in writing and literature from Emerson College and his MFA in poetry from Vermont College. He is co-founder of the nationally touring group, the Guerilla Poets, and the editor of *Speak These Words: A Guerilla Poets Anthology.* In 2001, Janaka won the Head-to-Head Haiku Championship at both the People's Poetry Gathering, and the National Poetry Slam. His poems have appeared most recently in North American Review, VOLT, and Maverick Magazine. In 2004, he founded Black Ocean Press, where he serves as managing editor. Visit Black Ocean on the web at http://www.blackocean.org.

Chet Frederick Fiction Award

The Chet Frederick Fiction Award honors the best work of fiction published in each issue. Former UMB professor K.C. "Chet" Frederick recently published his fourth book, Inland. Both poet and novelist, Mr. Frederick has received numerous awards, including a 1993 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has contributed short stories to publications such as Epoch, Shenandoah, Kansas Quarterly, Ascent, and Ohio Review.

This semester, the Chet Frederick Fiction Award goes to Tanya Boroff, for her story "Atmospheric Pressure." Elizabeth Searle acted as guest judge.

Elizabeth has written three books of fiction- *My Body To You*, *A Four-Sided Bed,* and *Celebrities In Disgrace*- and a theater piece, *Tonya & Nancy: The Opera.* She has published non-fiction essays in The Improper Bostonian, Post Road, and most recently, *Don't You Forget About Me*, an anthology published by Simon and Schuster. Her book reviews have been published in American Book Review and Ploughshares.

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award

The Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award honors the best work of non-fiction published in each issue. The award was named for a man with an abiding love of all types of non-fiction; among other things, Mr. Cookson has been a sportswriter in Massachusetts and Maine, an educator, an insurance executive, a cartoonist, and a selectman. Mr Cookson's son attended the University of Massachusetts Boston, and this award has been endowed by colleagues, friends, and family of Mr. Cookson to honor a life dedicated to education and excellence in non-fiction communication.

This issue's award goes to the anonymous author of "Sacrifice." Elizabeth Searle guest judged. (See Chet Frederick Fiction Award, previous page.)

Siren
Theodora Kamenidis